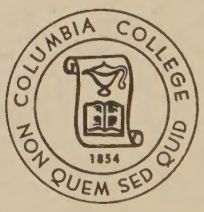

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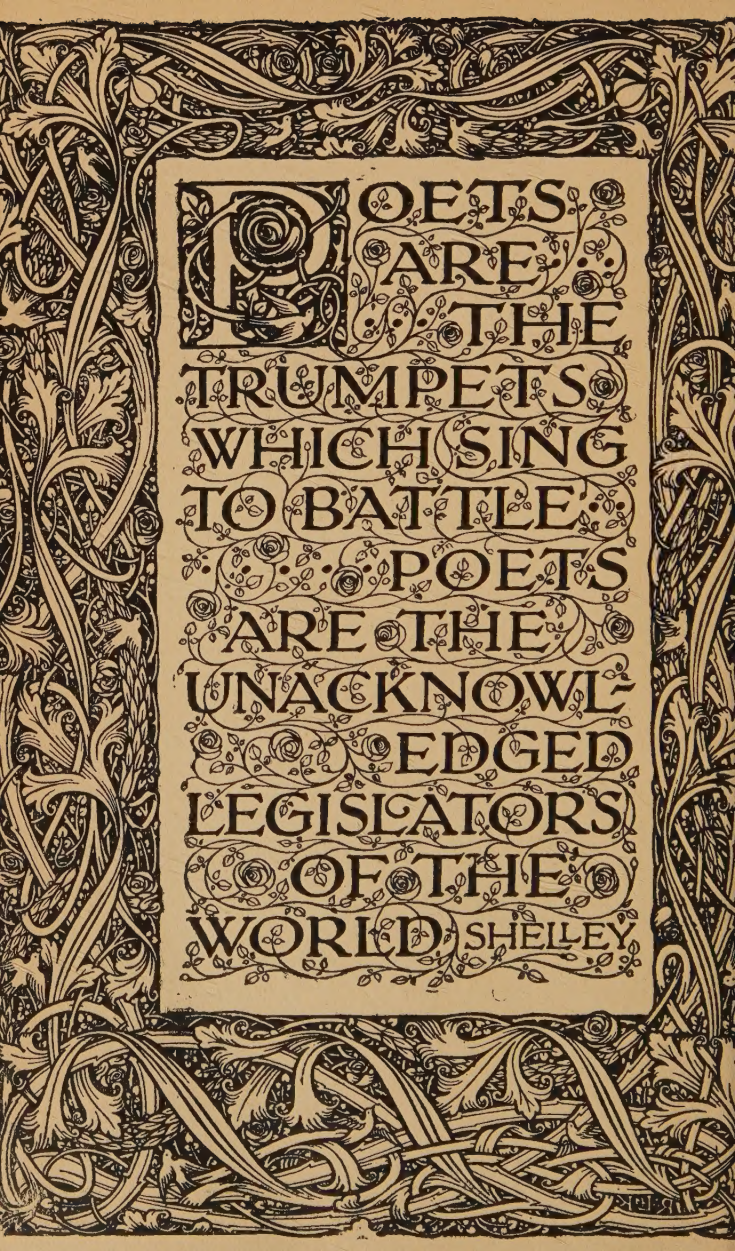
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POETS ARE THE TRUMPETS WHICH SING TO BATTLE POETS ARE THE UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS OF THE WORLD SHELLEY

BRAND

A DRAMATIC POEM

by HENRIK IBSEN

Translated by

F. E. GARRETT



LONDON & TORONTO
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INTRODUCTION

In 1909 I wrote, at Mrs. Garrett's request, the following note for Mr. E. T. Cook's *Memoir of Edmund Garrett:*[1]—

"Garrett's translation of *Brand* is, so far as the noblest and most vital portions of that great drama are concerned, a truly inspired piece of work. The "pity and terror" of the poem had entered into him and were part and parcel of his whole sense of human life. The central heart-beat of *Brand* was to him an 'exchange of pulses' with the universal throb of human passion and aspiration. It was one with the tragedy of victory in defeat, and defeat in victory, of which every heroic soul is in its turn the protagonist. It possessed him. There is a great passage in the first act, in which Agnes, after she and Einar have been interrupted in their sport by Brand, is wooed back by her lover to the light-hearted joy which the seer's visions and appeals had dissipated. She hardly hears his words, but in awed abstraction of mind asks him did he not see 'how the man *grew* as he spoke.' The reader of Garrett's translation, no less than of the original, knows well what she means. For he has already felt, once and again, a spiritual elevation and expansion entering into Brand's discourse which is as palpable as a physical phenomenon.

"Garrett professed no fine Norse scholarship. But there is something more vital to a translator than sensitiveness to philological minutiæ. It is sensitiveness to the author's moods and insight into his experience. To have an instinctive sense of what the author means is better than pedantic scrupulosity as to what he says. But evidently Garrett under-estimated the delicacy of his own feeling for the language. He relied much on the judgment of his friends, and was generous in his acknowledgments, but no one could have turned out such work as his without a sound, if not a technical knowledge of the idiom from

[1] *Edmund Garrett: a Memoir*, by E. T. Cook. Edward Arnold, 1909.

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which he was translating. In any case his mastery of English admits of no question. His resources seem to be almost boundless. He evidently believed that effective rhyme and rhythm could be and must be secured without any sacrifice of sense or phrasing. The English language always had the turn of expression that was not the best compromise between the two requirements, but the alliance by which each reached its maximum of realisation.

"In the great passages between Agnes and Brand, this ideal is infallibly embodied in Garrett's work. In the long passages in which we feel the almost unendurable jar between Brand's ideals and the common-places of his two principal foils—the Sheriff and the Dean—the translator himself evidently feels less secure, and is less firm in his tread. Here 'inspiration' can hardly be thought of, and resourceful skill is all that seems possible. And here, though Garrett is perpetually delighting the student of the original by his felicity and strength, his results have less of the sustained and sustaining quality than when the tension is higher. A discerning critic on reading his *Brand* would already have marked him out as the man chosen by the gods to translate Ibsen's lyrics."

To this note I have only to add that although Garrett is entirely right in his assertion that it is the "broad simplicity" of the central motive of *Brand* that "gives it its poignancy," there are nevertheless certain passages towards the end of the poem which must appear obscure, or at least wanting in definiteness and precision, unless it is borne in mind that the drama was written when its author was going through one of the most terrible experiences which a patriotic soul can encounter, the conviction, namely, that the country he loved, and in which his whole life was rooted, had betrayed its trust. For *Brand* was written in 1865, the year after the Dano-Prussian War, in which Germany annexed the Schleswig-Holstein provinces. Englishmen old enough to remember how we all sang "The Danish Flag and England's henceforth float side by side" at the wedding of the late king, then Prince of Wales, in 1863, and when the test came, in that very year and the year following, had to listen to the diplomatic explanations of our standing aside and allowing that Danish flag to be hauled down, will be able in some

faint degree to realise the feelings of shame and indignation which overwhelmed Ibsen when the Scandinavian brethren of the Danes who had all but pledged themselves to make common cause with them allowed them to fight and fall alone. The iron entered into his soul. Three poems, of which Garrett's English versions are printed in his volume of translations,[1] give direct expression to the feelings with which he regarded this betrayal of Denmark by her northern brethren. And it was this mood that not only gives the specific interpretation of Brand's dismal forebodings for his country when his own catastrophe is approaching, but also gives point and actuality to the passionate demand for action "up to the measure of accorded might," irrespective of the practical limitations on which prudence insists, that rings through the whole poem. And there can be no doubt either that the succeeding drama of *Peer Gynt* derives much of its intensity from the same source, and that many of its detailed references yield their secret to the same key.

PHILIP H. WICKSTEED.

[1] *Lyrics and Poems from Ibsen*, translated by Fydell Edmund Garrett. J. M. Dent and Sons, 1912.

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To

AGNES

FOR THOUSANDS OF READERS

THE AGNES OF IBSEN'S "BRAND"

LIKE THE

AGNES OF DICKENS IN "DAVID COPPERFIELD"

MUST HAVE IDEALISED A NAME

WHICH SURELY NO AUTHOR COULD WELL BESTOW

SAVE ON A PURE AND BEAUTIFUL CREATION

FOR ME

NOT EVEN NAMESAKES SUCH AS THESE

CAN ADD TO YOUR NAME

ONE NEW RAY

OF CONSECRATION OR OF LOVELINESS

F. E. G.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

A VAST deal has been written of late years about the methods and meanings of Henrik Ibsen. In the press, I have not been altogether innocent of swelling the stream myself. But in these pages I have determined to refrain from any lengthy epexegetics. If my work as translator be done decently, I think the reader can well dispense with my services as commentator. For there is a broad simplicity about the central motive of *Brand;* a simplicity which, amid so much that is romantic and so much that is realistic, almost recalls classic models. And after all, whatever else you may choose to see in the poem, it is this simple central motive which gives it its poignancy. In Brand's successive renunciations, in his sacrifice of ambition and career, his ordeal as a son, as a father, as a husband, the eternal struggle between life and ideals, between the absolute and the human, is represented with a naked force which renders some of the scenes, to me at least, among the most moving in literature. We are stirred as with a trumpet-blast when the weak and paltering side of human nature goes down before Brand's " All or Nothing "; when it is pure and tender love that is crushed by the inflexible demand, the pathos becomes too deep for tears. But that is because the pity and terror of it are the pity and terror of Life. Brand is a fanatical Norwegian minister of religion. But he is primarily a man—a man weeping " inwardly tears of blood." Brand's ideal is an impossible one. But every ideal that is worth anything is in some sense impossible, even to the dividing asunder of joint and marrow. Brand's God is a post-Christian version of the savage God of the Old Testament. But that only makes his religion a convenient dramatic embodiment of that ruthlessness of eternal law upon whose wheel struggling humanity is broken

to-day and will be broken to-morrow though it outgrow fifty religions. Brand's life ends in failure. But that, to Ibsen's mind at least (as to Browning's), is the goal at which one who is impelled to struggle towards the future, burdened with all the legacies of the past and hampered by the ties of the present, must be content to arrive. The riddle of the painful earth once more goes answerless; the balance between stern principle, which can abate no jot, and love which would soften all, is not adjusted. But it is natural that the chord of love should be left vibrating at the close, and not inconsistent to end upon a note of vague hope.

So much lies on the face of the poem, and requires no detailed commentary. Every work of art has as many meanings beside its central one as you care to look for; but I think Ibsen has sometimes suffered from the industry of commentators in tacking " to some useful end " every artistic detail of his pictures. Of course, there is an obvious parody of Brand's narrow " other-worldliness " in the converted Einar of the Fifth Act, and an equally obvious parody of other aspects of his character in the mad Gerd, with her mark that she never hits till the final crash, and her chilly " Ice-Church " which brings down death upon its worshippers. But her ravings throughout take their colour, with delicate poetic fitness, from the changing motives of the surrounding action, to which they are altogether ancillary. To torture a definite symbolism out of the " hawk " which haunts her crazed mind would be, to my thinking, prosaic and absurd. As well attempt the like (to take an illustration from another work of Ibsen's) with the " chimney-crack " which haunted the morbid imagination of the Master Builder. There were, if I am rightly informed, some enthusiastic country-women of Ibsen's who did not even stick at that. In ingenuous triumph they took their discovery to the Master and besought his imprimatur. Ibsen said that their interpretation was exceedingly pretty and ingenious. It had not, he added, occurred to himself.

Brand appeared in 1866, a year before *Peer Gynt*, and three years before the first of the prose "social dramas," so different in manner, which are to-day holding a European audience. *Brand* followed, therefore, hard upon the Dano-German war (1864), in which Ibsen's countrymen had bitterly disappointed him by leaving their Danish kinsfolk to struggle and fail alone against German aggressions. This gives the reader the clue to the only parts of Brand's denunciations of his fellow-Norsemen which are not equally applicable to other times and peoples. In Brand's long soliloquy in the Fifth Act, however, where he has visions of his countrymen refusing to rally to the defence of their highest principles, as well as to that of their kinsmen, and devoting themselves merely to industrial development and money-grubbing, there is one political passage which I have ventured to transfer, together with its explanation, to an Appendix. Its place in the text is marked by asterisks.

NOTE ON THE PRESENT TRANSLATION

THOSE who are interested in the elusive but fascinating art of verse-translation may expect a word or two about the methods of the present version. In most parts this errs, I think, on the side of literalness. Where it is at all loose, it is generally because I found a closer adherence to the letter of the original less faithful to its spirit. I have given a different turn to the phrasing of an allusion, here and there, to make it clear to the English reader, and so avoid the abomination of the footnote. An instance is my rendering of *fjaerhams laegg* (Act II. p. 117), which is in reality, I fancy, an obscure allusion to the feather-dress disguise so often resorted to by the gods of the old Norse mythology. A problem was presented by untranslatable terms like *vidde* and *bygden*, and by the recurrence of characteristic epithets such as "slack," where our more copious, if less sinewy, language naturally varies the phrase. In such matters I have held that Brand's fulminations against Compromise do not apply to translators. I have assumed the English forms of pronunciation of fjord, Brand, Gerd, Thor—it would have been grotesque to rhyme on such sounds as fyoor', Brahn', Gairrd, Toor. At the end of the play where a tag of doctor's Latin previously used by the Doctor is repeated by a supernatural Voice, I have translated that along with the Norwegian in which it is embedded.

Setting aside the airy little song of Einar and Agnes —the rhythm of which I have produced with more exactitude, I fear, than the charm—the metres of *Brand* are the iambic and trochaic varieties of the four-beat line, with an irregular rhyme-scheme. The trochaic form is used in the more emotional passages.

In these I have not indulged in as much freedom of accent-changing as a trained English ear requires; but I thought it better in many passages to keep as far as possible the severe cadence of the original. The Norwegian uses the feminine or double rhyme in both metres more richly than is possible in English except in comic or satiric passages, in which a *bizarre* rhyme rather helps than hinders the effect. In such Hudibrastic passages I have sometimes ventured on the Hudibrastic rhyme, for which there is occasional precedent even amid the copious resources of the Norwegian.

Brand contains difficulties of diction, and others, in which I have been much indebted to the kind aid of Fröken Margrethe Sang. I have no pretensions to such Norwegian scholarship as would have been equal to the task unaided. As it is, I have completed it under difficulties and interruptions which need not be entered into here, but which might serve to palliate some shortcomings were it not that " it is so easy ***not*** to " translate " a five-act tragedy."—F. E. G.

THE CHARACTERS

BRAND
HIS MOTHER
EINAR, AN ARTIST
AGNES
THE SHERIFF
THE DOCTOR
THE DEAN
THE SCHOOLMASTER
THE PARISH CLERK
GERD
A PEASANT
A LAD, HIS SON
ANOTHER PEASANT
A WOMAN
ANOTHER WOMAN
A CLERK
CLERGY AND OFFICIALS
PEASANTRY, MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN

THE TEMPTER IN THE WASTE
THE INVISIBLE CHOIR
A VOICE

(*The action takes place at the present day in various parts of a fiord-district on the west coast of Norway.*)

BRAND

FIRST ACT

Up amid the snow on the fells. The mist lies thick and heavy. A rainy half-light about dawn. BRAND, *dressed in black, with long staff and wallet, picking his way westward. A* PEASANT *and a lad his* SON, *who have joined company with* BRAND, *are somewhat behind*

THE PEASANT (*calls after* BRAND).

Halloa, man, never go so quick!
Where are ye?

BRAND.

Here!

THE PEASANT.

You'll go astray!
The mist is closing in so thick,
A body's eyesight barely passes
Beyond the measure of his stick. . .

THE SON.

Father, a crack!

THE PEASANT.

Hold there! Crevasses!

BRAND.

We've lost all traces of a track.

THE PEASANT (*screams*).

Stop! Here the ice is pie-crust-thin;
For God's sake do not tread it in!

BRAND (*listening*).

A waterfall sounds up, like thunder.

THE PEASANT.

Aye, 'tis a beck has worn it hollow,
No man could fathom how deep under:
'Twill take us all three at a swallow!

BRAND.

Onward I must, as I have said.

THE PEASANT

A giant's strength would be too little!
It's hollow underfoot, and brittle:
Stop, man! One step and you are dead.

BRAND.

I am a Great One's messenger.

THE PEASANT.

O! What's his name?

BRAND.

His name is God.

THE PEASANT

Indeed! And what might you be, sir?

BRAND.

A priest.

THE PEASANT.

May be. But if you trod
This path a Dean to boot, or Bishop,
By dawn there'd be a corpse to fish up—
If you will on, 'gainst all advice,
Along this overhanging ice.
[*Approaching him warily and persuasively.*
A priest, for all his brains and learning,
Can't turn a lane without a turning,
Don't be so stubborn and so stiff!
A man has but the single life,
That gone, where shall he get a second?
Next roof is seven miles off, close reckoned,
And the mist thickens up, as if
A man must cut it with his knife.

BRAND.

The less chance, so, of being beckoned
By jack-a-lantern down some cliff.

THE PEASANT.

But there are ice-tarns hereabout,
And once in those, you don't get out!

BRAND.

We'll cross them.

THE PEASANT.

On the water walk?
Your doing won't make good your talk.

BRAND.

Yet One has shown, with faith in God,
A man may pass across dry-shod.

THE PEASANT.

In *those* days!—Now, he wouldn't stop
Till he touched bottom, neck and crop.

BRAND.

Farewell! [*Going.*

THE PEASANT.

Be on your head your blood!

BRAND.

If of my life the Lord hath need
Then welcome precipice and flood!

THE PEASANT (*under his breath*).

Nay, but he's off his head indeed!

THE SON (*whispering*).

Father, let *us* turn back again!
It threatens blacker storm, and rain.

BRAND (*stopping and approaching them again*)
Hear, farmer: it was you who swore
Your daughter, living over-fiord,
Who now is lying at death's door,
Had sent a message and implored
To see her father—could not part,
Till then without a burdened heart?

THE PEASANT.

Aye, sure, 'tis God's truth what you say.

BRAND.

And she but gave you till to-day?

THE PEASANT.

Aye.

BRAND.

Not an hour beyond?

THE PEASANT.

What then?

BRAND.

Come on!

THE PEASANT.

I can't. Turn back again!

BRAND (*looking hard at him*).

Stop. Would you willingly pay down
To shrive her soul, a hundred crown?

THE PEASANT.

Aye, parson; that I'd gladly do.

BRAND.

Or even make the hundred two?

THE PEASANT.

To have her rightly saved and sped
I'd sell the house above my head.

BRAND.

But would you give . . . your life, instead?

THE PEASANT.

My *life?* My dear, good sir——

BRAND.

Aye, life.

THE PEASANT (*scratching his head*).

Nay, but there is a limit set . . .
In Jesu's name, man, don't forget
I've got a family and wife!

BRAND.

He, whom you speak of, had a mother.

THE PEASANT.

Ah, that was a long time ago
When wonders, each more strange than t'other,
Were worked, that can't be now, you know.

BRAND.

Get home. Your life is on death's road,
God does not know you, nor you God.

THE PEASANT.

Ugh! you're a hard one.

THE SON (*pulling at him*).

Come away!

THE PEASANT.

Aye, sure; but he must too, I say.

BRAND.

Must I?

THE PEASANT.

If you should go astray
Here, in your Master's plaguey weather,
And it were proved (as how gainsay?)
That you and we left home together
And you in bog or tarn, were drowned,—
I shall get handcuffed, I'll be bound,
And clapped in gaol,—or something rougher!

BRAND.

Then for God's work it is you suffer.

THE PEASANT.

I've no concern with His or thine;
I've plenty, and to spare, of mine.

BRAND.

Farewell.

[*A hollow roar is heard from far away.*

THE SON (*screaming*).

There goes an avalanche!

BRAND.

Let go!

THE PEASANT.

Nay come!

BRAND.

You shall not make me!

THE SON.

Come with us!

THE PEASANT (*struggling with* BRAND).

Nay, but, devil take me——

BRAND (*breaking loose and flinging him in the snow*).

Aye, so he will: don't let that fret you:
Sooner or late he's sure to get you. [*He goes.*

THE PEASANT (*sitting and rubbing his arm*).

My bones! The fellow's stout and staunch!
And such-like handling 'tis his quirk,
It seems, to call the Almighty's work!
[*He shouts as he picks himself up.*
Ho, priest!

THE SON.

He's off, along the height.

THE PEASANT.

Aye, but I have him yet in sight. [*Shouts again.*
Halloa there! Do you mind, I say—
Where was it that we left the way?

BRAND (*amid the mist*).

You need no posts to make that clear:
You're on the Broad Road, never fear!

THE PEASANT.

God give I be so! Then by right
I should sit safe and warm to-night.
[*He and his son go off eastward again.*

BRAND.

(*coming into sight higher up; he gazes out in the direction where the peasants went*).

They stumble home. O sluggard thrall!
Had you one drop of will at call,
And were it but the power you lack,
I would have borne you on my back:
My weary back, my feet that bleed
Had gladly answered to your need.
But help is useless to a man
Who does not *will* save where he *can!*
[*He goes on further.*
Life, life! . . . These goodmen and their wives,
What price they set upon their lives!
The merest losel you can find
For life, dear life, is as afraid
As if the saving of mankind
Were on his sorry shoulders laid.
Much will they give with willing mind,
Leave them but Life, dear Life, behind.
[*Smiling, as at a reminiscence.*
At school, two fancies of the brain
Shook my young sides to ache again;
And in our gammer's testier vein
Earned for my skin a taste of swish,
An Owl that dreads the dark, a fish
With water-fright: I laughed, I flung
Them off; but tooth and nail they clung.

Whence did it spring, that laughter-spasm?
From some vague inkling of the chasm
'Twixt Is and Should be, Fact and Wish?
'Twixt shoulders bound to bear, and heart,
That finds too hard the bearer's part?
And such an Owl and such a Fish
Seems each good neighbour, sick or sound;
Framed for the deeps of life, a dim
Familiar of its darkling round,
This, this it is that frightens him.
Between the foreshore and the sea
He flounders in his agony:
From his own roof of star-hung night
Recoils to scream for fierce day-light.

[*He stands still a moment, starts, and listens.*

Is that a sound of song I hear?
Yes, it is singing blent with laughter—
A cheer! And yet another cheer!
A third, a fourth one follows after!
Out streams the sun. The mists unfold,
I see the great white plains unrolled.
There, on the mountain's shoulder, stand
The revellers in the sunny dawn,
The upland shadows westward drawn:
They 'change farewells and grasps of hand,
And now they separate. The rest
Turn eastward, but these two come west.
Now one last message, friend to friend,
With hat and veil and hand, they send.

[*The sun is breaking more and more through the mist.* BRAND *stands for some time looking down on the newcomers.*

About those two there is a light
As if mists melted where they were,
And heather clothed each slope and height,
And heaven laughed, round him and her . . .
A sister, surely, with her brother—
Children they must be of one mother!
Now they are springing, hand in hand,
Over the carpet of the heather;
See, she skims it like a feather,

And he is lithe as a willow wand!
There she slips from him! . . . He would claim
A capture. . . . No, she speeds along . . .
Now their chase becomes a game,
And hark! their laughter turns to song!

[EINAR *and* AGNES, *in light travelling dress, flushed and heated, come tripping over the levels. The fog is gone. A clear summer morning lies over the fell.*

EINAR.

Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
I'll capture you on the wing;
I am weaving a net with the meshes close,
And the meshes are songs I sing.

AGNES

(*dances backwards before him and keeps eluding him*).

If I am a butterfly tiny and bright
Let me sip the flower of the ling;
And you, be a boy that is chasing me,
And never is capturing.

EINAR.

Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
In vain you flutter and flit;
I've woven my net now, safe and sure,
And you soon shall be fast in it.

AGNES.

If I am a butterfly, dainty and fresh,
Then follow as gaily I flee;
But O, take care not to touch my wings
If your net falls over me.

EINAR.

No! I shall lift you to light on my hand,
And lock in my heart away
To play all your life at the merriest game
That ever you learnt to play.

[*Without noticing, they have come to a sheer precipice. They now stand right on the brink.*

BRAND (*shouts down to them*).

Stop, stop! Behind you is a rift——

EINAR.

Who shouted?

AGNES (*pointing up*).

Look!

BRAND.

Quick, save yourselves!
You stand upon a hollow drift
Which sheer into the valley shelves!

EINAR

(*throws his arms round her and laughs up at* BRAND).

For her and me no need of fears!

AGNES.

Our game has all our lives before it!

EINAR.

We tread a path with sunshine o'er it
Which ends not for a hundred years.

BRAND.

You don't go down till then? All right!

AGNES (*waving her veil*).

Then to the sky our game takes wing.

EINAR.

A hundred year of revelling
With bridal lamps lit every night,
An age of playing catch, is given—

BRAND.

And then?

EINAR.

Then home again—to heaven.

BRAND.

So that is where you come from, eh?

EINAR.

Aye, to be sure. Where else?

AGNES.

At least,
Just now we've come to the mountain way
From the next valley, lying east.

BRAND.

I thought I spied you: just a sight
Caught on the backbone of the height.

EINAR.

Yes, it was there upon the brow
We parted from our friends, just now,
And sealed, with hand-grasp and with kiss,
Our store of precious memories.
Come down to us, and I will tell
How God has been incomparable!—
You shall feel Joy's entrancing spell!
Don't hang there like an icicle!
Thaw, man! Ah, now the frost grows fainter . . .
First, then, I tell you, I'm a painter;
And so—of all delightful things!—
My hand can help my thought to wings,
And life into dead pigments rub,
As God makes butterfly from grub.—
Then, what surpasses all beside,
He gave me Agnes for my bride.
From southern travel here I happed;
My paint-box on my back was strapped—

AGNES (*eagerly*).

As fresh and gay as any king,
And with a thousand songs to sing

EINAR.

And just as through the throp I went,
She too was on a visit there:
She came to drink the mountain air,
The sun, and dew, and spruce's scent.
And me some inspiration led—
" Go seek for Beauty's fountain head

By woodland beck, by spruce-grown heath
(It sang within me, clear and loud)
Up where, the vaulted heaven beneath,
There floats an under-heaven of cloud."
My master-piece I painted there:
Her cheeks like two blush roses were,
Eyes lit with laughter, and a smile
That sang into my heart the while—

AGNES.

You painted, but you did not see me—
At one blind draught you drained life's cup
And stood again, one morning, dreamy,
With staff in hand and wallet up—

EINAR.

Then flashed the thought, and struck me through:
Why, you have quite forgot to woo!
Ho! Quickly wooed was quickly plighted,
And everything grew clear as day,
And our old Doctor so delighted
As he himself could scarcely say.
And so he held a three-days' feast
And dance, in honour of our gage;
With Sheriff, Bailiff, Judge and Priest,
And all young people of an age.
The homestead party broke last night;
But not the revelling, for all that;
With flag on stick and leaf-wreathed hat
Along the slope and up the height
A crowd accompanied our flight.

AGNES.

With dallying, dancing, overtaking,
Our journey was a merry-making—

EINAR.

In a silver stoup we pledged delight—

AGNES.

Our song rang through the summer night—

EINAR.

And the fog that rolled up thick from nor'ward
Streamed off from us as we went forward.

BRAND.

And now your way conducts you—where?

EINAR.

On, to the town.

AGNES.

My home is there.

EINAR.

First past yon summits: then our course
Dips down to the fiord's western side,
And then, full-steam, on Egir's horse,
Home to the bridal feast we ride:
Last, in some southern land alight,
Like two swans from their firstling flight!

BRAND.

And then?

EINAR.

A life of bridal feast
Fair as a legend, vast as dreams,—
For know, this bare hillside (that seems)
Is a great temple, without priest,
Where our young life has been released,
This Sabbath morn, from all distress
And consecrate to happiness!

BRAND.

By whom?

EINAR.

The merrymakers all.
They exorcized with goblet's clang
Each tempest-cloud that dared to hang
Round the light leafage of our bower:
Out of the language they expelled
Each word that in its bosom held
The menace of a muttering squall,
And gave us leaves for coronal
And joy's inheritance for dower.

BRAND.

Farewell you two! [*Begins to go.*

EINAR (*starts and looks closer at him*).

Nay, wait a minute . . .
I seem—there may be nothing in it—
To recognize. . . .

BRAND (*coldly*).

You know me not.

EINAR.

Yet I made sure that I had got
Some memory-clue. . . . Sometime, somewhere,
At home or school . . . if I may scan . . .

BRAND.

At school, yes; we were comrades there.
I then was boy. I now am man.

EINAR.

It surely never is?
(*Exclaiming suddenly*) Your hand!
It *is* you! Now I know you—Brand!

BRAND.

I knew you from the very start.

EINAR.

Well met! Well met, with all my heart!
Aye, the same solitary elf
Whom, still sufficient to himself,
No games could ever draw away
To join his comrades' boisterous play.

BRAND.

Yes, I was homeless, there as here . . .
Yet you I think that I held dear:
Though all of you down south seemed made
Out of some other stuff than I
Who sprang beside an estuary
In a gaunt precipice's shade.

EINAR.

Your native place is here, I know.

BRAND.

I pass it now, the way I go.

EINAR.

Pass it? Then further yet you roam?

BRAND.

Further, yes—far beyond my home.

EINAR.

You are a priest, if I may guess?

BRAND (*smiling*).

A diocesan pastor, yes;
Who here to-day, to-morrow pops
Up there, like hares in a spruce-copse.

EINAR.

And what's your final destination?

BRAND (*hastily and sternly*).

Ask not of that.

EINAR.

But why?

BRAND (*changing his tone*).

Ah, well!
Your ship—the ship of which you tell—
Must drop me also at some station.

EINAR.

My bridal steed? Hurrah, that's merry!
Think, Agnes! One road takes us all.

BRAND.

But I am for a funeral.

AGNES.

A funeral!

EINAR.

Who is it you bury?

BRAND.

That God of whom you are so proud.

AGNES (*recoiling*).

Come, Einar!

EINAR.

Brand!

BRAND.

In shell and shroud
An earth-bound God, a thrall to clay,
Shall be laid out in the full day.
'Tis time we made an end of it:
High time you knew, what's long past veiling,
He's been these thousand years an-ailing.

EINAR.

Brand, you are ill!

BRAND.

No, fresh and fit
As ever was rock-rooted fir
Or mountain-springing juniper!
It is this sickly time, be sure,
This generation, that needs cure.
You would but dally, laugh, and play:
Believe, but turn your eyes away,
And shuffle off the burden's smart
On One who, so you learn came down,
Paid the Great Forfeit—that's *His* part—
And wore for you the thorny crown,—
So, you can dance with a light heart!
Dance on; but where your dance will end
That is another thing, my friend!

EINAR.

Ah, now I see. This tune one hears
By thorp and town: it's now in favour.
You're of the latest pattern blackcloth,
Who make life out a vale of tears,
And with the pit's sulphureous savour
Would drive the whole world into sackcloth.

BRAND.

Nay, I'm no moralizing preacher:
I do not speak as priest or teacher:
Scarce know if I'm a Christian.
But this I know: I am a Man,
And on the hurt I lay my hand
That drains the marrow from our land.

EINAR (*smiling*).

What! You're the first that ever said it,—
Our good old country with the credit
Of somewhat surplus lustihood!

BRAND.

Nay, if it were so, that were good:
Joy never harmed the breast that fed it.
Grant you are slaves to pleasure: well,
Be so, from curfew-bell to bell:
Don't be some special thing one minute
And something else the next, by fits!
Whate'er you are, be whole-souled in it,
Not only piecemeal and in bits!
There's beauty in a true Bacchante:
Your maudlin toper's charm is scanty.
Silenus still is picturesque:
A tippler is the faun's grotesque.
Go round the country, do but fling
A watchful glance at folk: you'll see
That every one has learnt to be
A little bit of everything.
A little smug (on holy-days);
A little true to old-time ways;
A little sensual when he sups—
(His fathers were so in their cups;)

A little ardent when in hall
Sounds festal song about the small
But rock-embattled rock-born folk
That never bore with stick or stroke;
A little lavish in his pledges;
A little snivelling, when he edges
(Sober) from what his lips but ill-meant,
E'en liquor-loosened, for fulfilment.
But all, you see, is just a little:
He fails—a jot; succeeds—a tittle;
In gross and detail, he's a fraction
Of good and ill, of thought and action;
And every fraction (that's the pest of them)
Completely cancels all the rest of them!

EINAR.

Scoffing's an easy pastime, very:
It would be finer to forbear—

BRAND.

Perhaps: but not so salutary.

EINAR.

Well, be your list, for all I care,
Of popular defects allowed:
But, pray, how will you bring your scoff in
About the God whom you would coffin,—
That God of whom I still am proud.

BRAND.

Friend, you're an artist. Put before us
This God. You've painted him, one hears,
And people praised the work in chorus . . .
Say: he was something gone in years?—

EINAR.

What then?—

BRAND.

Of course. And going grey?
Thin-haired as is old gaffer's way,
With frosty beard, like silver-thread?
Not cross—or just enough, let's say,
To frighten children off to bed;

Slippers—or was it stocking-feet?
That's not a point at which one boggles;
But I am sure 'twas only meet
To put a skull-cap in and goggles.

EINAR (*angry*).

What do you mean?

BRAND.

I do not jest.
'Tis just his portrait, I protest—
So featured, fitted out and shod—
Our national, our domestic God.
As Rome into a puling baby
Turns the Redemption hero, you
Make God a poor decrepit gaby
With second childhood well in view.
As the Pope chafes on Peter's chair
Left with his picklock in the lurch,
So you would narrow everywhere
Our Lord's world-empire to a Church.
Life and belief you wholly sever:
To *be* seems worthy no man's strife:
To breathe is still your best endeavour—
Not living out a whole, full life.
A race that trifles and malingers—
A God that peeps between his fingers—
Paint him, to fit his period,
A bald, grey, skull-cap-pated God!
My God is of another mind,—
A storm, where yours is but a wind:
Where yours is deaf, inexorable:
All-loving, where your God is dull.
And He is young, like Hercules,—
No grandad in the seventies.
His voice in awful thunders rolled
What time the Thorn-bush flamed, of old,
And shrank, on Horeb's trembling height.
Ev'n Moses to a pigmy mite.
He stayed the sun in Gibeon's vale,
And other wonders, passing tale,
He did, and even yet would do
Were not the age grown slack, like you.

EINAR (*with an uncertain smile*).
And you'll regenerate the age?

BRAND.
I will! For hear: I know it sure:
I, I was born this war to wage,
This slowly sapping wound to cure!

EINAR (*shaking his head*).
Don't quench the match, for all its reek,
Until the lantern burns up steady;
And don't destroy the tongue we speak
Till your new glossary is ready.

BRAND.
Nay, 'tis at nothing new I aim:
'Tis rights Eternal I proclaim.
Dogmas and churches come and go:
Theirs is another cause than mine is;
Both saw their first day once, and so
May see their last, for all I know:
Each thing created finds its *finis*,
Gets tainted by the moth and worm,
And must, by changeless nature's norm,
Give place to some yet embryo form.
But there is something still that stays,—
The Spirit uncreate, once lost,
Then saved, at the Redemption's cost,
In the beginning of the days:
That threw a bridge, when faith was fresh,
From Soul, the aspiring Soul, to Flesh.
Now it is hawked about retail
Since these new views of God prevail.
But from these fragments of the soul,
These spirit-torsos that remain,
These heads and hands, shall spring a Whole,
That God shall know His own again,—
His Man, His Masterpiece, His Heir,
His Adam, young and strong and fair!

EINAR (*interrupting*).
Farewell. We part here. That is best.

BRAND.

Aye. Do you go towards the west:
I'll to the north. Two pathways trend
Fiordward. To both there is one end,
Farewell!

FINAR.

Farewell!

BRAND (*turns as he is going down*).

Keep day apart
From dusk. Remember, life's an art.

EINAR (*waving him away*).

Turn the world upside down at will:
My old-time God I hold by still.

BRAND

Good. Paint the cripple, crutch and all:
I go to make his funeral!

[*Goes down by the path.*

EINAR (*moves silently away and looks after* BRAND).

AGNES

(*stands a moment abstractedly; then she starts, looks round uneasily, and asks*)

Is the sun down?

EINAR.

No, passing through
A cloud; see, there he shines anew!

AGNES.

How cold the wind is!

EINAR.

Aye, we just
Caught through the gap a sudden gust.
Climb down.

AGNES.

They did not stand so black,
Those southward fells that bar our track . . .

EINAR.

You did not mark them, till he came
And screamed, and scared us off our game.
But let him go: we'll pick our sport
Up where the hare-brain cut it short.

AGNES.

Not now: I am too tired to play.

EINAR.

Why, so am I: and truth to say,
Down here it's not so easy quite
As up there on the level height.
But when this lies behind,—ah yes!
We'll dance for very wantonness
With ten times greater fire and fun
Than otherwise we should have done.—
See, Agnes! see that streak of blue
Which now lies glittering in the sun:
It laughs, it shimmers, changes hue,
Silver, then shot with amber through,—
That, on the far horizon clear,
That is the great fresh Ocean, dear!
And do you see that thread of black
Which, lingering, marks the fairway track?
And do you see the speck-like shape
Which, as we watch it, rounds the cape?
That is our steamer,—yours and mine!
Right up the fiord she cuts a line:
This evening, out she stands from fiord
Seaward, with you and me aboard!
Now round her the grey mist is poured . . .
Speak, Agnes! Over sky and sea
What lovely colours now are streaking!

AGNES (*gazes absently before her, and says*)

Yes, yes . . . But tell me, did you see—

EINAR.

What?

AGNES

(*without looking at him, and in a hushed voice, as if in church*).

How he grew while he was speaking!

[*She goes down along the path.* EINAR *follows her.*

A path along the mountain cliff, with a wild precipice out to the right. Farther off, above the mountain, glimpses of greater heights, with peaks and snow.

BRAND

(*is walking along the path, coming downwards. He stops midway on a projecting nab, and looks down the precipice*).

Now I know my ground: can tell
Every farm and boathouse well,
Every estuary birch:
Shelving cliff, and old brown church:
Alder fringe along the stream:
All comes back, like childhood's dream! . . .
Only that I think to-day
All looks smaller, and more grey;
And upon the mountain's brow
Sheerer the snow-cornice juts,—
From the valley's sky-strip cuts
Yet another cantle, now,—
Threatens—lours—o'ershadows—shuts—
Filches more of sun, I vow! . . .

[*Sits down and gazes into the distance.*

There's the fiord. Did that of old
Look so narrow and so cold?
'Tis squally. There's a squire-rigged sloop
Standing in before the wind.
South, beneath the cliff's dark stoop,
Shows a warehouse, and a quay,
And a red-walled farm behind,—
The widow's on the estuary.—
The widow's farm . . . my childhood's home!
Thousand memories thronging come.
There, by strand and scattered stone,
My child-soul learnt to be alone.

O, I feel the weight, I groan,
Strangled by the bonds of blood
With a soul that to the mud
Clove, still alien to my own. . . .
Now my great ambitions pale,
Blurred as if behind a veil!
Now my strength and courage fail
Mind and soul grow slack and frail!
Standing here on home-like ground
Stranger to myself I seem,—
Wake, like Samson from his dream
In the whore's lap, shorn and bound. . . .
[*He looks down the precipice again.*
What's the stir and bustle here?
Out from every cottage round
Women, men and children stream:
Now in screes and broken ground
Slow the long lines disappear,—
Show again, as soon as gone,
By the old church, further on. [*He stands up.*
O I know you, mind and soul,
Creatures dull of heart and slack!
Your " Our Father " seems to lack
Wings,—it has not in its whole
Diapason one full groan
That can reach God overhead
With a living voice's tone,—
Save when those six words are said:
Give us, Lord, our daily bread.
That much you have made your own:
Watchword of the land, indeed,
From its context rudely torn
'Tis in every bosom borne.
There it lies—the one forlorn
Jetsam of a shipwrecked creed!—
Hence! this hole is airless: close
As a mine is, or a grave!
Here there's not a wind that blows
Fresh enough a flag to wave!
[*Starts to go; a stone is thrown from higher up, and rolls down the slope close by him.*

BRAND (*shouts up*).

Who's throwing stones?

[GERD, *a girl of fifteen, is running along a cliff edge with stones in her apron.*

GERD.

He screams! He's hit!

[*Throws again.*

BRAND.

Child, stop that game! Enough of it!

GERD.

Ah! there he perches, scatheless now
And swinging on a windfall bough . . .

[*Throws again and screams.*

Here he comes, fierce as e'er I saw . . .
Help! O, he tears me, beak and claw!

BRAND.

God help you!

GERD.

Hush! who are you? Stay,
Keep still: now he will fly away.

BRAND.

Who'll fly?

GERD.

You saw the hawk just now?

BRAND.

Here? No.

GERD.

The curst great bird that flies
With crest pulled flat against his brow
And gold red ring about his eyes.

BRAND.

Where are you going?

GERD.

Churchwards.

BRAND.

O,
We can join company if so.

GERD.

Nay, higher up I have to bear.

BRAND (*pointing downwards*).

But *there's* the church.

GERD

(*looking at him with a scornful smile and also pointing down*).

What, that one there?

BRAND.

Aye; come with me.

GERD.

Nay, that's so . . . *mean!*

BRAND.

Why mean?

GERD.

Because it is so small.

BRAND.

And where have you a greater seen?

GERD.

Ah! I could find you one. . . . Farewell.

[*She is going on higher.*

BRAND.

What, child! Is that the way you call
Churchward? That leads to the wild fell.

GERD.

Come with me, you! and I will show
A church built out of ice and snow!

BRAND.

Ah, now I catch at what you mean!
Comes back a piece of boyish lore:
Up there, the crags and spurs between,
There is a cleft in a ravine:
The Ice-Church was the name it bore.

There was much talk about the place,
A frozen tarn, for floor, below;
Above, a cowl of clinging snow
Which, roof-like, overhung a space
From off the southern precipice.

GERD.

Aye, it looks naught but fell and ice;
But none the less it is a church.

BRAND.

Avoid the place! A sudden lurch
Of wind may break the hanging ice:
A shout, a rifle-shot, suffice—

GERD (*without listening to him*).

Come, see a herd of reindeer, swept
Down by the avalanche, and kept,
Till this year's freshets came, unseen.

BRAND.

Avoid the place! There's danger there!

GERD (*pointing downwards*).

Avoid *that* place, for it is mean.

BRAND.

Poor child! God have thee in His care.

GERD.

Come with me! Mass is sung up there
By avalanche and waterfall:
Wind preaches, from the glacier-wall,
Till you turn hot and cold together!
The hawk looks in, but dare not stop:
He just swoops down on Blackfell top,
And there the ugly brute will perch
On the crag-steeple of my church—
The cock that tells the folk the weather!

BRAND.

'Tis a wild soul and a wild way,
A zither with a flaw-sprung frame:
Mere worthlessness bides still the same;
But ill may turn to good, some day.

GERD.

O, there he comes with whirring wing . . .
Now I must get me under roof:
Farewell, farewell! The church is proof. . . .
How fierce and ugly! Look he's there!
[*Screams.*
Don't touch me, you! I've stones to fling,
Sticks against talons, never fear!
[*She runs away up the mountain.*

BRAND (*after a pause*).

There goes a church-goer, too, confessed!
By hill, by dale, which way is best?
Which stumbling spirit seems to roam
Most wildly lost to peace and home?
The giddy mind that flaunts a wreath
While precipices yawn beneath:
The sluggish mind that crawls along
With use and custom, right or wrong:
The mind distraught, whose dizzying flight
Makes foul seem fair and wrong seem right?
On, to the battle! Fierce defiance
To this unholy Triple Alliance!
As when a shutter stands ajar
My Call's thin sunbeam glints from far:
For these three ogres, headlong hurled,
Were succour to a suffering world:
The wind that blows across their grave
Mankind from pestilence shall save.
Up, sword from scabbard, Soul! and fight
To win the heirs of heaven their right!
[*He descends into the valley*

SECOND ACT

Down by the fiord, hemmed in by steep mountain walls. The old tumble-down church stands on a foot-hill in the near distance. A storm is brewing. PEASANTS—*men, women and children—are gathered in groups, partly down on the strand, partly on the rising ground. The* SHERIFF *sits in the midst on a stone. A* CLERK *assists him. Corn and provisions are being distributed.* EINAR *and* AGNES, *surrounded by a crowd, stand some distance away. A few boats lie on the beach.* BRAND *comes forward over the church-hill without being noticed by the crowd.*

A MAN (*struggling through the crowd*).

Make way!

A WOMAN.

I came before you!

THE MAN (*thrusting her aside*).

Back!

[*Pushing forward to the* SHERIFF.

Look here! Put something in my sack!

THE SHERIFF.

Give time!

THE MAN.

For God's sake, look alive!
There's four at home sit hungry—five!

THE SHERIFF (*jocularly*).

You can't just fix the number, eh?

THE MAN.

One fought death, as I came away.

THE SHERIFF.

Stand by.—Your name's upon the list?
[*Turning over his papers.*
No. . . . Yes!—Be thankful you weren't missed!
[*To the* CLERK.
Give Number Twenty-Nine his rations,—
Now, now, good people! Do have patience.
Nils Snemyr?

A MAN.

Aye!

THE SHERIFF.

You'll only score
Two thirds of what you got before.
You are one fewer.

THE MAN.

Aye, you're right.
Ragnhild was taken off, last night.

THE SHERIFF (*making a note of it*).

One less. It's always well to save.
[*To the* MAN *who is withdrawing.*
But don't start running for your life
To get yourself a second wife!
[*The* CLERK *giggles.*

THE SHERIFF (*sharply*).

What are you laughing at? Behave!

THE CLERK.

That made me laugh,—your worship's sally
Because your worship was so witty.

THE SHERIFF.

Be still. The case is sad, yet pity
Needs sorrow naught, 'tis best to rally.

EINAR
(*coming out of the crowd with* AGNES).
I've cleared my purse: I've had to clear
My pockets, too; I must decamp
And go aboard a perfect tramp,
And pawn my watch and stick, I fear!

THE SHERIFF.
Yes, in the nick of time you've come,—
What I've collected is but little;
Help soon runs out, you understand,
When ill-fed mouth and toil-worn hand
Must share a tittle of their tittle
With those who have not got a crumb.
[*Catches sight of* BRAND, *and points up at him.*
Welcome! One more! You've heard about
The floods, and scarcity, and drought?
If you've a purse there, pull it out! . . .
All contributions we receive!
We've spent the little we could raise;
Five fishes, in a famine, leave
But little over, now-a-days!

BRAND.
Dealt out in any name but God's,
Five or five thousand were small odds.

THE SHERIFF.
It was not words I asked for: thrown
To hungry mouths, a word's a stone.

EINAR.
Perhaps you have not yet heard tell
How hard the poor folk have been pressed,
With famine and bad times and pest?
Here folk lie dead—

BRAND.
I see it well.
By the blue ring round leaden eyes
A man may see who holds assize.

THE SHERIFF.
Yet hard as flint you still stand by!

BRAND

(*stepping down among the crowd and speaking with emphasis*).

Were life here gliding sluggishly
And slackly past, with daily need,
O then the bread-beseeching cry
Would make me pity you indeed:
Creeping like beasts bent double—then
The latent beast comes out in men!
Each drowsy day seems still the same—
Treads as a funeral-march is trod:
O, *then* a man may think his name
Is cancelled from the book of God.
Rather to you the Lord is good:
He sprinkles horror in your blood,—
Smites you with scourge of deathly stress,—
Takes back the lives held valueless—

SEVERAL VOICES (*interrupt him threateningly*).

He spurns at us, so sore bestead!

THE SHERIFF.

He rails at us who gave you bread!

BRAND (*shaking his head*).

O, if the stream of my heart's blood
Could slake you, heal you with its flood,
That stream should flow until the bed
Of the spent veins were parched and dead! . . .
But to help here were sin! Look higher!
See, God would raise you from the mire!
Though crushed, a living folk will gain
Marrow and strength from stress and strain;
The dull eye takes the falcon's flight,
And holds the promised land in sight;
The weak will stands at bay once more,
Sees through the strife the victory sure!
The flock that cannot even from Need
Gain nobleness, is lost indeed!

A WOMAN.

A squall comes up, as if it heard
And waked in anger at his word.

ANOTHER.

God won't be flouted, I foretell. . . .

BRAND.

Your God will work no miracle!

THE WOMEN.

Look, what a sky!

VOICES AMONG THE CROWD.

Quick! break his bones!
At him, the brute, with knives and stones!

[*The peasants crowd round* BRAND *threateningly.* THE SHERIFF *steps in among them. A* WOMAN, *wild and with disordered dress, comes hastening down over the foot-hills.*

THE WOMAN (*shrieking out to the crowd*).

Help, find me help, in Jesu's name!

THE SHERIFF.

What's wanted? What distress or shame—

THE WOMAN.

'Tis the worst horror out of hell!

THE SHERIFF.

What is it? Speak!

THE WOMAN.

I cannot tell!
Find me a priest at any cost!

THE SHERIFF.

This parish has none.

THE WOMAN.

Lost! He's lost!
Hard wast thou, God, when thou mad'st me!

BRAND.

A priest is not far off, may be.

THE WOMAN (*clutching him by the arm*).

Then let him come—and not be slow.

BRAND.

Tell me your need and he will go.

THE WOMAN.

Across the fiord—my man—

BRAND.

Go on!

THE WOMAN.

Three hungry bairns—the food all gone—
He is not damned?—Say no! Say no!

BRAND.

Speak first.

THE WOMAN.

The want had parched my breast:
Man never helped—God never smiled:
The youngest fought with death, hard pressed
It pierced his soul—he smote the child!

BRAND.

He smote—

THE CROWD (*in horror*).

His own child!

THE WOMAN.

Then, struck dumb,
The awful depth he seemed to plumb
Of his wild deed: remorse was rife,—
And he laid hands on his own life!
Come, save his soul in storm's despite!
He cannot live, he dare not die;
Fondling the corpse, he can but lie
And shriek to all the powers of night!

BRAND (*quietly*).

Yes, *here* is Need!

EINAR (*pale*).

Can such things be?

THE SHERIFF.

He's not within my shrievalty.

BRAND (*to the peasants*).

A boat! Come put me over there.

A MAN.

What! In this storm! There's none would dare!

THE SHERIFF.

A path leads round the fiord—

THE WOMAN.

No, no!
There it's not possible to go:
I came there, but the river brast
The bridge behind me as I passed!

BRAND.

Unmoor a boat!

A MAN.

A surfy sea
Washes the reef: it cannot be!

ANOTHER.

Look there! A gust from off the height
Has left the whole fiord seething white.

A THIRD.

With such a sea, such surge and spray,
The dean sends word, " No church to-day! "

BRAND.

When there's a sinner's soul to save,—
Dying,—who waits on wind and wave?
[*He goes down into a boat and looses the sail.*
The *boat* you'll venture?

THE OWNER.
Aye,—but stay—!

BRAND.
Good; now for him who'll venture *life!*

A MAN.
I will not go.

ANOTHER.
Nor I, to-day!

SEVERAL.
Who goes, makes widow of his wife!

BRAND.
Your God helps no one over fiord,
But mine is with me, here on board.

THE WOMAN (*wringing her hands*).
He dies unsaved—

BRAND (*shouting from the boat*).
One man of nerve,
To help with scoop and sail, will serve:
Come, one of you that lately gave!
Give, men, to Death and to the grave!

SEVERAL (*shrinking back*).
Ask not for that!

ONE MAN (*threateningly*).
Come back to land!
It is too much to tempt God's hand!

SEVERAL VOICES.
Look, the storm rises!

OTHERS.
The rope's broke!

BRAND
(*grapples himself fast with the boat-hook and shouts to the strange woman*).
Come, then—but quickly, you who spoke!

THE WOMAN (*shrinking back*).
I? When no man—

BRAND.
Come! Let them stand.

THE WOMAN.
I cannot come!

BRAND.
You cannot come?

THE WOMAN.
Nay, but I've little ones at home!

BRAND (*laughs scornfully*).
Your house is built upon the sand!

AGNES
(*turns upon* EINAR *with flushing cheeks, lays her hand on his, and says*)
Have you heard *all?*

EINAR.
Yes. . . . He is staunch.

AGNES.
God bless you! Yes, you know your task.
[*Cries to* BRAND.
Here is *one,* worthy found to launch
And help a poor soul to be shriven!

BRAND.
Come, then!

EINAR (*pale*).
I?

AGNES.
You, whom I have given!
To heaven I look; God's help I ask!

EINAR.
If I had ne'er met you, I vow,
I would have given myself, to steer—

AGNES (*trembling*).

But now?—

EINAR.

I'm young, and life is dear! . . .

I cannot!

AGNES (*starting back from him*).

Cannot?

EINAR.

Dare not!

AGNES (*shrieking*).

Now

A surging, swirling ocean-wrack
Rolls in between us, tempest-driven! [*To* BRAND.
I come with you.

BRAND.

Then come!

THE WOMEN (*terrified as she springs on board*).

Alack!

Christ save her!

EINAR (*catching at her in despair*).

Agnes!

THE WHOLE CROWD (*rushing up*).

Stop! Turn back!

BRAND.

Where lies the house?

THE WOMAN (*pointing*).

Right over fiord,
Behind the black rock, on yon ness!
[*The boat pushes off.*

EINAR (*screaming after them*).

Think of your mother daughterless!
Be saved!

AGNES.

We here are Three on board!

[*The boat sails out. The peasants throng together on the foot-hills and gaze after it in great excitement.*

A MAN.

He clears the point!

ANOTHER.

No!

THE FIRST SPEAKER.

Yes! for, see,
It lies abaft now, well to lea.

ANOTHER.

A mountain gust! They're caught in that!

THE SHERIFF.

Look! It has blown away his hat!

A WOMAN.

Black as a raven's wing, his hair
Streams wet and wild in the wild air!

THE FIRST MAN.

The fiord is all a-boil!

EINAR.

I heard,
Piercing through wind and storm, a scream!

A WOMAN.

That's from the mountain.

ANOTHER (*pointing up*).

There stands Gerd,
And laughs, halloaing after them.

THE FIRST WOMAN.

She's blowing in a wether's horn
And throwing stones for witching-corn!

THE SECOND WOMAN.

She's flung the horn away; she stands,
Look! hooting in her hollowed hands!

A MAN.

Aye, hoot and shriek, you ugly troll!
God shields and watches yon man's soul!

ANOTHER.

I'll go in worse wind on the fiord
Next time, and glad, with him aboard.

THE FIRST MAN (*to* EINAR).

What was he?

EINAR.

Priest.

THE SECOND MAN.

One thing we can
See for ourselves: he was a man!
He'd pluck, and stubbornness, and strength!

THE FIRST MAN.

There's our right pastor found, at length!

MANY VOICES.

Aye, there's our pastor, found at length!
[*They disperse over the foot-hills.*

THE SHERIFF.

It's most irregular, I'm sure,
To step into another's Cure,
Meddling and letting danger loose,
Without an adequate excuse.—
I do my duty,—but, you see,
Always within my shrievalty. [*Goes.*

Outside the cottage on the ness. The day is some way advanced. The fiord lies smooth and quiet. AGNES *is seated down on the strand. Presently* BRAND *comes out of the door.*

BRAND.

That was Death! It washed away
All the terror, all the stain;
Now, the calm, grand features smile
All unburdened of their pain . . .
Could illusion so beguile—
Turn his night to such a day? . . .
Of his hellish deed and wild
He but saw the outer crust:
What the mouth can name, the hand
Grasp, what leaves his name a brand,—
His violence to the little child.
But those two, who, pale and scared,
In the chimney-corner thrust,
Like two birds close-huddled sat,—
They who only stared and stared,
Open-eyed, nor knew what at,—
They into whose souls a stain
Eats its way, that toil nor time
Ever shall erase again
Even when they are grey and bowed,—
They whose life-stream will have flowed
From the memory of his crime,—
Who must grow in the red light
Of his shuddering deed of night,—
They who cannot burn away
The foul carcase of their thought,—
Ah! he could not see that *they*
Are the two who have to pay
When the reckoning is brought.—
And from them, perchance, outruns
Link on link of sin: O, why?—
Hear the void abyss reply:—
Because they were their father's sons! . . .
Cannot mercy blot the score?
Not one damning line ignore?
Where does the vast debt, our kin

Have bequeathed to us, begin?
Who shall measure its extent
When the Great Assize draws nigh?
Who shall plead, who testify,
Then, where none is innocent?
Who dare show his document,
Soiled, long passed from hand to hand?
Will this plea as answer stand:
'Twas my father made this debt?
Riddle dark unplumbed! The brain
Scans thy dizzying depths in vain.—
Yet the crowd can still forget;
On the precipice's brink
Still can dance, when, did they think,
They would fall upon their knees!
Barely one in thousands sees
How mere life is one immense
Towering mountain of offence!

[*Some of the peasants come up from behind the house and go up to* BRAND.

A MAN.

We meet again.

BRAND.

He's past your aid.

THE MAN.

Aye, he's well holpen now; he's free.
But in the cottage he leaves three . . .

BRAND.

And so?

THE MAN.

What scraps we had, we made
A little something of, you see . . .

BRAND.

If you gave all that could be sought,
Save life, then know that you gave naught.

THE MAN.

If he, who there in death is laid,
Were struggling now in deathly strife,
And cried, from his boat's keel for aid,
Why, then I'd venture even life!

BRAND.

But the *soul's* danger—that's a joke?

THE MAN.

Remember, we're but toiling folk.

BRAND.

Then turn your back upon the light
That breaks above the mountain height;
Don't squint, one eye on heaven, as now,
And one turned earthward, where you bow
A willing back beneath the yoke.

THE MAN.

I thought that you would rather say:
" Rouse you and cast the yoke away."

BRAND.

Aye, if you can.

THE MAN.

You have the strength.

BRAND.

Have I?

THE MAN.

Ere now there's many a one
Has told us where the way should run:
The way you showed, you *went,* at length.
A thousand words leave not the same
Deep print as does a single deed.
We seek you in the hamlet's name:
We feel a man is what we need.

BRAND (*uneasily*).

What would you with me?

THE MAN.

Be our priest!

BRAND.

I? Here!

THE MAN.

You've read or heard at least
Our parish is without one?

BRAND.

Yes! . . .

THE MAN.

It used to be a bigger place.
When bad times came, and crops were frozen,
And poor folk sickened by the dozen,
And, hit by hunger, begged for doles;
When need half stupefied our souls,
And meat and grain grew dear,—befell
A scarcity of priests as well.

BRAND.

Ask much, but this forbear to ask!
On me is laid a greater task:
The world's wide-open ears I need,
On life's full-pulsed emotions feed:
Here by the fell shut in and pent,
The voice of man falls impotent.

THE MAN.

A word that's roundly breathed and well
Sounds longer, answered by the fell.

BRAND.

Who shuts himself into a cave
While green the meadow-levels wave?
Who ploughs the waste and stony land
With fallow acres to his hand?
Who plants the stone to get increase
While the fruit ripens on his trees?
Who dulls his soul with petty things
When he has vision's fire and wings?

THE MAN (*shaking his head*).
Your deed spoke clear: not so your speech.

BRAND.
Ask no more. I am for the beach.
[*Begins to go down.*

THE MAN (*stepping in front of him*).
This Call of yours, this holy strife
You yearn for and will not let drop—
Is it then dear to you?

BRAND.
My life!
It is my life to me!

THE MAN.
Then stop! [*With emphasis.*
If you gave all that could be sought
Save life,—remember, you gave naught!

BRAND.
One thing can never be resigned;
One gift there is, a man must keep,—
His inner self. He dares not bind,
He dares not stem, whate'er befall,
The headlong current of his Call;
It must flow on to the great deep.

THE MAN.
Though marshes bury it from view,
Seaward it wins at last, as dew.

BRAND (*looking fixedly at him*).
Who gave you speech like this?

THE MAN.
'Twas you,—
You, in the hour of your great deed.
When the sea lashed and the storm blew,
And you dared both, to help the need

Of one distracted sinner's soul,
And staked your life upon a rotten
Plank,—then some thought made many a mind
Turn hot and cold, like sun and wind,
And seemed like a great bell to toll—
[*His voice drops.*
To-morrow it may be forgotten;
And then the aspiration's flag
That you unfurled will droop and drag.

BRAND.

Where is no strength, no Call I see . . .
[*In a hard voice*
If what you should you cannot be—
Be wholly, solely what you can,
Be of the earth an earthy man!

THE MAN (*gazes on him a moment; then says*)

Woe then to you, who quenched our light;
And us, who for one flash had sight.
[*He goes. The rest follow in silence.*

BRAND (*looks after them for some time*).

One by one, with down directed
Gaze, and head upon the breast,
Halting feet, and mien dejected,
Plod they homeward—crushed, oppressed.
Each, as though his doom he pondered,
Going, shrinks before a scourge;
Even as Adam may have wandered
Over Paradise's verge,—
Sullen, shamefast, uncomplaining,
Peering darkened worlds across,
Richer, by hard knowledge gaining,
Poor, by ignorance's loss . . .
I would make—how could I dare it!—
New, clean men: but see them plod!
See, guilt's image, how they bear it,
Whom I thought to make like God! . . .
Out to mountain-levels wide!
Here no knight has room to ride.—
[*Is going, but stops as he sees* AGNES *on the strand.*
See, she still sits listening there!

'Tis as though some voices sung
To her ear from the void air . . .
Listening sat she in the boat
As the weltering waves it smote;
Listening to the thwart she clung;
Listening, from her forehead clear
Shook the wild sea spray that glistened . . .
'Tis as if the sense to hear
Changed, and with her eyes she listened!
[*Approaches her.*
Tell me, girl, why still you gaze
Where the fiord's long reaches bend?—

AGNES (*without turning*).

Fiord and earth seem both at end,
Vanish as it were, in haze . . .
Dawns a new world on my eyes,
Outlined sharp against the skies:
I see oceans, estuaries:
Sunlight glimmers through the mist:
Rays of lambent glory light
Peaks of cloudy amethyst:
Spreads a desert, infinite:
There the lofty palm-trees stand:
Swaying in the searching wind,
Cast black shadows on the land:
Not a sign of life I find:
It is like a world in making.—
Cries a voice, the silence breaking,—
Many voices, yet one voice,—
Make 'twixt heaven and hell thy choice!
Do thy work, accept thy fate!
Lo, this world shalt thou create!

BRAND (*carried away*).

Say, what more you see!

AGNES (*laying a hand on her breast*).

Within
Smoulder powers, I feel them glow:
I can feel floods overflow,
I can see a dawn begin!

For the heart extends its bounds,
Grows a mighty world and great,—
And again the voice resounds:
This the world thou shalt create!—
All the thoughts that shall be thought,
All the deeds that shall be wrought,
Breathe, awake, no more lie dumb,
As the hour of birth were come;
And I see not, yet divine,
A great Presence, from above
Looking down on me and mine
Full of sorrow and of love:
Gentle, as the dawn's first breath,
Only, sorrowing unto death.—
And once more I heard the voice:
Now create and be created!
Make 'twixt heaven and hell thy choice!
Do thy work, as thou art fated.

BRAND.

Yes, *within!* The word I hear;
There's the way; the track leads true.
Heart, my own heart, is the sphere
Ripe for God, created new!
There the Newborn Man shall kill
That old vulture of the Will! . . .
Let the world, then, go its way,
Slaving, singing, as it may;
Only, if we meet as foes,
If the world would cramp my task,
Then, by Heaven, I shower my blows!
Cannot room on earth's whole round
Just to be one's self, be found?
Man's one right, 'tis all I ask!
[*Thinks in silence a moment, then says*
To be one's self!—But then the weight
Of one's hereditary debt? [*Stops and looks away.*
Who is this that comes, bent double,
Clambering up the hill with trouble? . . .
Now to get her breath she stops;
Now her tottering limbs she props,

And her wizened fingers creep,
Clutching at her pockets deep—
As if she bore some hoard, her all!
Her gown about her body thin
Hangs like a moulting vulture's skin,
And her hands are bent like hooks . . .
So a nailed-up eagle looks,
Stretched against a storehouse wall.
[*In sudden fear.*
What cold gust of memory, come
From the fiord, my childhood's home,
Sprinkles hoar-frost round this gaunt
Woman—seems my soul to daunt,
Icier still, and, breath to smother?—
God of mercy! 'tis my Mother!

BRAND'S MOTHER

(*is coming up behind him. She stops on the ascent, when only half in sight, holds her hand to shade her eyes, and looks about her*).

It's here they said he was, I mind. [*Comes nearer.*
Fiend take the sun! I'm well nigh blind.
Son, is that you?

BRAND.

Yes.

HIS MOTHER (*rubbing her eyes*).

Ugh! this bright
Glare seems to burn into my sight,
Until I can't tell priest from peasant.

BRAND.

At home, I saw no sun at all
From fall of leaf till cuckoo-call.

HIS MOTHER (*laughing quietly*).

Aye there one keeps as cool and pleasant
As the ice-man in the water-fall!
You wax so strong that what you will
You dare,—and feel your soul safe still.

BRAND.

My time is short. Good-day—good-bye.

HIS MOTHER.

Yes, you were born a quick one. Why,
As boy, you would be off and roam—

BRAND.

'Twas you who wished me to leave home.

HIS MOTHER.

And with good reason, too; at least,
There was good cause to make you priest . . .
[*She looks at him closer.*
Well! he has grown up strong and tall.
But heed one word that I'll let fall:
Take care of life!

BRAND.

And that is all.

HIS MOTHER.

Life? Yes, what would you more than live?

BRAND.

Is that the whole advice you give?

HIS MOTHER.

What else you like;—but life!—I gave it,
And I demand that you shall save it. [*Angrily.*
Fine tales of what you've done folk bear me!
Enough to horrify and scare me!
Afloat to-day! You might have lost
What you should treasure, at all cost,
For *my* sake! You're my flesh and blood,—
And you're the last of all the race:
You're just the coping-ridge, to grace
The house I've built up from the mud.
Hold fast; keep out of wear and tear!
To keep alive, and not give way—
That's the whole business of an heir;
And you'll be mine—at last—some day!

BRAND.

So that is what you come to say,
And seek me out with bulging pockets?

HIS MOTHER.

Son, are you mad? [*Drawing back.*
Don't lay a hand . . .
I'll use my stick against you! Stand!
[*More quietly.*
What did you mean by that?—Look here:
I'm ageing, graveward, year by year:
'Tis but a few years more or less:
Then—you get all that I possess!
It lies there, told and weighed, in dockets—
No! here I've not a penny by me!—
It's all at home: not much, but still
The man who gets it won't do ill . . .
Stand where you are! Don't come anigh me!
I will not hide a doit, I swear,
In cracks and crevices of wall,
Nor grub the ground up, none know where,
Nor stow it under plank or stone,—
My son and heir shall have it all;
The total goes to you alone!

BRAND.

On some conditions?

HIS MOTHER.

On this one—
That with your life you do not play.
Keep the stock going, son by son,
And that will make me quite content . . .
Then, just take care that nothing's spent,
Or parted out, or paid away;
Swell it you may or you may not;
But hoard, still hoard, the sum you've got!

BRAND (*after a brief pause*).

On one thing let's have out the truth.
I've gone against you from my youth;
You've been no mother, I no son,
Till you are grey and I am grown.

HIS MOTHER.

I want no petting, no caress;
I've no such weakness to confess.
Be hard, be stubborn—I don't feel;
Be ice—my breastplate is of steel;
But hoard! though barren it may be,
Keep money in the family!

BRAND (*goes a step nearer*).

And if it comes into my head
To scatter it to the winds instead?

HIS MOTHER (*staggers backwards*).

To scatter what through years of care
Has bent my back and bleached my hair!—

BRAND (*nods slowly*).

Yes, scatter!

HIS MOTHER.

Son! If that you dare,
It is my soul that you will scatter!

BRAND.

And if I find that no great matter?
If by your bed some night I stand,—
When by your side is set the light,
And you, the hymn-book in your hand,
Sleep as men sleep on death's first night,—
If then I rummage, grope about,
Find hoard on hoard, and clutch them out,
And with the candle set alight—

HIS MOTHER (*coming close in excitement*).

Where did you get such thoughts?

BRAND.

Ah, guess! . . .
Or shall I tell you?

HIS MOTHER.

Tell me, yes!

BRAND.

From something, then, that happened far
Back in my childhood—yet my soul
It seams as with a hare-lip scar,—
So deep it bit into the quick,—
An autumn evening: you lay sick,
And father dead. Then in I stole
Where pale he lay; the wax-lights glared;
I in a corner stood and stared,
Saw how his hand a hymn-book kept,
But wondered most how deep he slept,
How thin his wrists! . . . I smelt a taint
Of clammy linen, chill and faint . . .
And then I caught a stealthy tread:
In came a woman—saw not me—
And made directly for the bed:
There, fell to groping feverishly . . .
And first, she moved the dead man's head,
Drew out a packet—three or four;
And counted—whispered, " More, there's more! "
Then moved the pillows—grabbed, beneath,
A packet, tied and knotted over:
With hurrying hands she tore the cover—
She bit the knots with eager teeth;
Still groped, and found, and, as before,
She counted and she whispered " More! . . ."
She wailed, she prayed, she swore, she went
Hot on the hidden treasure's scent,—
Finding, she seized with falcon's pounce
'Twixt tears and glee, each several ounce:
Last, every cranny cleared, in gloom
Like a damned soul she left the room,
Happed up her find, and with a fall
Of voice, groaned out—" So *this* was *all !* "

HIS MOTHER.

My find was scant to what I sought;
And it was more than dearly bought.

BRAND.

It cost you dearer still; it stole
My love away from you—my soul!

His Mother.

Let that alone. That story's old,—
To give a human soul for gold.
But when I first became a wife
I gave—the shipwreck of my life!
I gave . . . a something now gone cold;
A something bright with wings to fly,
I fancy: sweet and silly too . . .
I scarce know, now; but then I knew . . .
Love was the name folk called it by.—
I mind, my struggle was severe:
I mind the counsel in my ear:
Forget the cottage lad: take rather
The other fellow, said my father.
He's wizened, but he's got a head:
He's doubling all he owns, they said.—
I took him, and took naught but shame;
To doubling-point he never came.
Since then I've drudged; and toil and trouble
Have brought it not far off the double.

Brand.

And do you now, so near your grave,
Remember that your soul you gave?

His Mother.

I took good care of that, at least,
When I put you to be a priest.
To earn what's left you, when my hour
Is come, you'll steer me, safe enough:
I've got the gold and lands and stuff,
And you've the comfort and the power.

Brand.

You did amiss, though shrewd and sage,
To gauge me by your money-gauge.
There's many a one, by slope and shore,
With your parental love,—no more.
A child's a steward, to your mind,
Of any scraps you leave behind.
Your thoughts are sometimes startled by
Some glimmer of eternity:

At this you catch, and, as you grope,
Come somewhere near the thing, you hope,
When in a single knot you tie
Your money and your family:
Thus life and death you would allay,
Adding the years up till their sum
Seems to eternity to come!

HIS MOTHER.

Don't pry into your mother's mind
But take your money when you get it.

BRAND.

And all the debts you leave behind?

HIS MOTHER.

The debts! What debts? I'm not indebted.

BRAND.

Suppose you were,—then I should have
To honour every bond. 'Tis shame
If a son leaves a single claim
Unmet, beside his mother's grave.
Though 'twere an empty house I took—
Descends with it your debit-book.

HIS MOTHER.

There is no law says that.

BRAND.

No, none
In black and white. But there is one
Deep-branded in the mind and will
Of every honourable son,
And this it is which I fulfil.—
O blind! there's time for seeing still.
You've docked God's part in you, misspent
The human soul which He has lent;
With mire and mould have overlaid
The image in which you were made;
Your spirit once was winged: you slipped
Among the crowd and got it clipped.
This is your debt. Where will you then,
When God demands His own again?

HIS MOTHER (*nervously*).

Where shall I then? . . .

BRAND.

Your son shall clear
Your debts off for you! Have no fear:
God's image, which you dared to stain,
Shall from my Will rise clean again!
Go calm to death. I will not let
My mother slumber deep in debt!
Your debts are mine.

HIS MOTHER.

My sin as well?

BRAND.

Debts only. Fear, nor dare rebel!
Your soul's debts can your son atone;
Its sin you answer for alone.
The sum of human service, lost
In you since you were thrall to clay,
To the last fraction of its cost
Another's service still can pay;
But for the losing it, God saith,
He must have penitence—or death!

HIS MOTHER (*disquieted*).

I had best get me home, and seek
The jutting glacier's shade; for here
The sun and sultry glare bring out
A crop of poison-thoughts, that sprout
And turn one giddy with their reek!

BRAND.

Aye, seek yon shadows; I am near.
When you feel drawn to heaven and home
And want me, then send word: I come.

HIS MOTHER.

Aye, breathing punishment and death . . .

BRAND.

No! when the need for that has ceased,
The tender son, the gentle priest,
I stand 'twixt you and horror's breath:
Stand by your bed, and chant the pains
Out of your fever-tortured veins.

HIS MOTHER.

You swear to come when word is sent?

BRAND.

I come, that hour when you repent.
[*Coming closer to her.*
I make conditions, too. I crave
That of free will you cast away
All that now binds you to the clay,
And go down naked to your grave!

HIS MOTHER (*striking wildly at him*).

Go bid the flame its heat forget,
The snow to chill, the sea to wet!
Abate your price! Make God take less!

BRAND.

A babe in middle fiord upset,
And then beg God the deed to bless.

HIS MOTHER.

Ask other penance,—hunger, thirst;
Not this, the greatest and the worst!

BRAND.

Not all the rest, if this you grudge,
Can plead for mercy with your judge.

HIS MOTHER.

If I with gold the poor-box stuff?—

BRAND.

With *all?*

HIS MOTHER.

O, is not *much* enough?

BRAND.

All's vain, until like Job you lie
Among the ashes down, to die.

HIS MOTHER (*wringing her hands*).

My life made forfeit—soul undone!
My gold, soon, scattered by my son! . . .
I'll home and to my bosom tight
Clasp all in which I've still a right . . .
Child of my bitter agony,
My gold, for you my breast has bled:
I'll home, and like a mother cry
Over her dying baby's bed!—
Why was my spirit born in flesh?
If flesh's lust is spirit's mesh? . . .
I am afraid. Keep near me, priest!
My hour may find me all aghast.
But if my gold must go, at least
I'll put it off until the last! [*Goes.*

BRAND (*looking after her*).

Yes, thy son shall linger near thee:
Waiting for thy message, stand;
Fly to warm thy chill old hand
Soon as it is stretched, and cheer thee!
[*Goes down to Agnes.*
Evening is not as the morning:
Then I set my heart on war;
Heard the battle-cry afar;
Burned, a sword of wrath to wield,
Crush great lies, and, fiercely scorning,
Hem the world 'twixt shield and shield!

AGNES (*has turned and looks brightly up at him*).

Morn was pale beside this eve!
Then, to dally and deceive
Pleased my heart: I strove to gain
That which, gained, were worse than vain.

BRAND.

Dreams of beauty, dreams of might,
Came like wild swans full in flight;

Lifted me on stretching pinions,
Bore me high through wide dominions,
Out I steered upon the world
Where the waters loudest sounded;
All our foes I headlong hurled;
Moved by pageantry surrounded,—
Incense streamed upon the air,
Silken flags, and anthems loud,
Alleluias from the crowd,
Round my life's work, all were there.
All lay beckoning and bright!
Ah, but all was only dreaming:
Like a waste in glory dight
By a momentary gleaming
'Twixt the lightning and the light
Now, I stand where darkness falls
Long before the day is done:
All the world behind high walls,
Overhead, one strip of sun;
'Twixt the gully and the sound—
But I stand on home-like ground.
Now my Sabbath song is dumb,
Riderless my wingèd steed:
But a greater goal I see
Than a joust of chivalry:
Drudgery's self shall now become
Sabbath-service, grand indeed!

AGNES.

And this God that was to fall? . . .

BRAND.

Fall He shall, in spite of all;
But obscurely, secretly,
Not where all the world may see.
I confess, I have mistaken
What will make our people whole:
Trumpets blown and banners shaken
Cannot raise, transform, console:
Gifts may start and powers awaken—
Still a wreck remain the soul.

No, it is the Will that matters,
Makes the freedom or the fall!
Firm, while all around it shatters!
Firm, in sunshine or in squall!

[*Turns in the direction where the parish lies ; over which the evening shadows are beginning to fall.*

Come, then, dullard souls who roam
This my narrow valley home!
Man to man, in converse still
Trial of our work we make;
Lies and half-truths fight, and wake
The young lion of the will!
Yes, the hand that breaks the earth
Is as near to manly worth
As the hand that swings the sword;
And the end of both is one:
To be tablets for the Lord,
Clean, for him to write upon.

[*He turns to go.* EINAR *meets him.*

EINAR.

Stop! Restore me what you took!

BRAND.

There the girl is sitting: look!

EINAR (*to Agnes*).

Choose between the upland lea
And this den of misery!

AGNES.

Nay, I have no choice to make.

EINAR.

Agnes, Agnes! Hear me; take
Warning from that saying old:
" Light to lift is heavy to hold."

AGNES.

I shall hold until I break.
Go, with blessings, tempter fair!

EINAR.

Think of all for whom you care . . .

AGNES.

Give my mother greeting kind;
I will write, when words I find.

EINAR.

On a sea of silver graven
Skim the white sails from the strand;—
Day-dreams crossing wistful brows,
Lofty pearl-besprinkled prows
Fly and follow to their haven,
Far towards the longed-for land!

AGNES.

Sail to east or sail to west,—
Deem me buried: that is best.

EINAR.

As a sister come with me!

AGNES (*shaking her head*).

Rolls between us two a sea.

EINAR.

O, go home, then, to your mother!

AGNES (*quietly*).

Not from teacher, friend, and brother!

BRAND (*coming a step nearer*).

Girl! take heed; bethink you well!
Pent and pushed 'twixt fell and fell,
Shadowed, jutted over, left
In the twilight of a cleft
Runs my life henceforth away
Like an autumn evening grey!

AGNES.

Darkness frightens me no longer:
Strong the starlight gleams and stronger!

BRAND.

I am stern in what I crave,
My demand is Naught or All!
On the path a single fall
Flings your life to wind and wave.
Here's no haggling room for fear;
Grace for failure none is here;
If the course outruns your breath,
Willing you must go to death!

EINAR.

Fly from this bewildering craze!
Leave this stern, Mosaic man;
Live your life, the life you can——

BRAND.

Choose: you stand at the parting ways. [*Goes.*

EINAR.

Make your choice, 'twixt peace and strife!—
'Tis a choice 'twixt joy and sorrow,
And a choice 'twixt night and morrow,
And a choice 'twixt death and life!

AGNES (*rises and says slowly*)

Into night! Through death! Withdrawn
Far, comes glimmering in the dawn.

[*She follows in the direction in which* BRAND *went.* EINAR *gazes after her a moment with a lost look, bows his head, and goes away towards the fiord.*

THIRD ACT

Three years later. A little garden at the parsonage. A sheer mountain cliff rising above it; round the garden a low stone wall. The fiord lies in the background, narrow and shut in. The house door opens on the garden, with steps leading up to it. It is afternoon. BRAND *is standing on the steps,* AGNES *sitting on a step below him.*

AGNES.

Dear husband, once again your eye
Sweeps the fiord's waters anxiously . . .

BRAND.

I wait a message.

AGNES.

You have fears——

BRAND.

It is my mother's word I wait.
Now I've waited three long years,
For that which came not, soon or late.
To-day I hear, by certain presage,
Her hour is very nearly come.

AGNES (*softly and affectionately*).

Brand, you should go without a message!

BRAND.

Save she repent and kiss the rod,
I bring no comfort, I am dumb.

AGNES.

She is your mother.

BRAND.

Not my God:
Whose curse is on the knee that bows
To idols made of its own house.

AGNES.

Brand, you are hard!

BRAND.

To you?

AGNES.

O, no!

BRAND.

'Twas a rough path that I foretold . . .

AGNES (*smiling*).

And broke your word: it is not so!

BRAND.

Yes, it is nipping here; the cold
Makes pale the colour in your face;
And freezes up your tender heart,
There is no thriving in a place
Where stones roll down and snowfalls start.

AGNES.

Placed here so close, our risks are fewer;
So jutting is the glacier-wall
That, when leaves shoot on every branch
And down descends the avalanche,
It leaves the parsonage secure
As if behind a waterfall.

BRAND.

No sunshine penetrates down here.

AGNES.

But how it dances, warm and soft,
On the hill's shoulder, there aloft!

BRAND.

In summer, yes, for three short weeks;
But to its foot comes never near.

AGNES (*looks fixedly at him, rises and says*)

Brand, in your voice a terror speaks!

BRAND.

In yours!

AGNES.

No, yours!

BRAND.

You do not tell,
But nurse a dread——

AGNES.

Brand, you as well!

BRAND.

You reel as on some dizzying brink—
Speak out! Tell all!

AGNES.

I sometimes think . . .
I tremble—— [*She stops.*

BRAND.

Yes! For whom?

AGNES.

The boy.

BRAND.

For Alf?

AGNES.

You also.

BRAND.

Now and then . . .
But no, our God is good to men;
He will not take away our joy . . .
My little lad in time will grow
As big and strong as can be found.—
Where is he now?

AGNES.

Asleep.

BRAND (*looking in at the door*).

There seems
No pain or sickness in his dreams;
The little hand is plump and round——

AGNES.

But pale.

BRAND.

Yes, pale . . . But that will go.

AGNES.

How soothingly he sleeps, and sound!

BRAND.

God bless thee! Slumber into health!

[*He shuts the door.*

With you and him there sank a wealth
Of light and peace around my Call;
Griefs hard to bear, work hard to do,
All became easy through you two:
With you, my courage could not fall,
He nerved me with his childish play!
I took my Call as martyrdom:
How differently all has come!
Success has shone about my way——

AGNES.

Yes, Brand, but you have earned success!
O you have toiled and battled so;
Have borne the struggle and the stress,—
Wept, inly, tears of blood I know!

BRAND.

All easy, with your love to bless,
And round my stormy soul to fling
The sunshine of a day in spring!
Love I had never known: 'twas not
Aroused by father or by mother;
'Twas theirs the fitful spark to smother
If from the ash perchance it shot,—
As if the sum of soft and mild
I bore secreted in my soul
Were saved to make an aureole
Round thee, dear helpmeet, and the child!

AGNES.

Not us alone; all those who come
Within the circle of our home,

Whom grief makes son, whom need makes brother,
Each crying child, each suffering mother,
Need never unrefreshed depart
From the full table of your heart.

BRAND.

Only through you and him! You threw
Heaven's bridge of gentleness, you two . . .
For who can in his arms enfold
All men, till he has first loved one?
I might have longed and yearned, still cold,
Till my heart hardened into stone,——

AGNES.

And yet—your love is hard, they say;
And whom you would caress, you smite.

BRAND.

You, Agnes?

AGNES.

Me? O, no! 'Twas light,
All that of me you ever sought;
But many a soul has fallen away
Before your watchword, All or Naught!

BRAND.

Of what the paltering world calls love
I will not know, I cannot speak;
I know but His who reigns above,
And His is neither mild nor weak;
Hard even unto death is this,
And smiting with its awful kiss.
What was the answer of God's love
Of old, when in the olive-grove
In anguish-sweat His own Son lay;
And prayed, O, take this cup away?
Did God take from Him then the cup?
No, child; His Son must drink it up!

AGNES.

So measured, even from its birth
Is doomed each soul upon the earth.

BRAND.

We know not. . . . But God's laws proclaim
In letters of eternal flame:
Till the last pang, stand firm in strife:
No haggling for the crown of life!
Mere sweat of anguish gains no heaven;
The martyr's fire awaits you still.
To fail in power may be forgiven,
But never to have failed in will.

AGNES.

Yes, it must be as you have said!—
O, lift me where you climb aloft!
Your heavens are high, and though my mind
Is staunch, my courage lags behind;
And my head swims with fear, and oft
My weary feet seem turned to lead.

BRAND.

Agnes! To all the flock there cries
One voice: No craven compromise!
Who labours but by halves, and shirks
The full, is damned in all his works;
And we must still make good our teaching
By living, not alone by preaching.

AGNES (*throws herself on his neck*).

Where you set foot, I follow you!

BRAND.

No mountain is too steep for two.

[*The* DOCTOR *has come down the road and stops outside the garden wall.*

THE DOCTOR.

Ho! What's this sombre desert doing,
I ask, with billing and with cooing?

AGNES.

My dear old Doctor! O, come in!

[*Runs down and opens the garden gate.*

THE DOCTOR.

No, no! You know you're in disgrace
With me. It was a perfect sin
To tie yourself to such a place,
Where windy wold and wintry weather
Cut soul and body through together!

BRAND.

Not through the soul.

THE DOCTOR.

You think, not quite?
Well, I'm inclined to think you're right.
The troth you were so quick to plight
Appears to stand quite fast and hard,
Though one might think—the proverb's trite—
That lightly made is lightly marred.

AGNES.

A bell's one note, a sunbeam's play
May wake one to a summer day.

THE DOCTOR.

Good-bye. A patient's sorely sick . .

BRAND.

My mother?

THE DOCTOR.

Yes. You come my way?

BRAND.

Not now.

THE DOCTOR.

Perhaps have been there?

BRAND.

Nay.

THE DOCTOR.

Priest, you are hard. I hurried quick
Across the sleety moor, although
She pays at pauper-rate, I know.

BRAND.

God bless your energy and skill!
Ease her hard struggle, if you can!

THE DOCTOR.

Let Him bless rather my good-will;
Soon as I heard her need, I ran.

BRAND.

You she sent word to; she forgets
One anxious heart that waits and frets.

THE DOCTOR.

Come without word!

BRAND.

Till word I hear,
I have no duty there, no sphere.

THE DOCTOR (*to* AGNES).

Poor child! You are indeed ill-starred
Laid in the power of hands so hard!

BRAND.

I am not hard.

AGNES.

He'd give his whole
Heart's blood if it would cleanse her soul.

BRAND.

Long since, as son and heir, I took
Of my free will her debit-book.

THE DOCTOR.

Clear off your own debts!

BRAND.

In God's eyes
One soul the sin of many clears . . .

THE DOCTOR.

Not one who, like a bankrupt, lies
Himself in debt o'er head and ears.

BRAND.

Bankrupt or rich, I wholly *will*;
And this one thing suffices still.

THE DOCTOR (*looking fixedly at him*).

Yes, of man's will the *quantum satis*
Stands to your credit, I'll engage;
But, priest, your *conto caritatis*
Is still a white and virgin page! [*He goes.*

BRAND (*following him for a moment with his eyes*).

No word is so besmirched, be-lied,
As this word, Love, on every side:
With hell's own craft they make it fill
The flaws and breaches in their will,
And, with deception ever rife,
Conceal the mockery of their life.
Is the path strait, unsure, and steep?
In *love* they turn aside to sleep;
Choose they the broader road of sin?
Love gives them still a hope of heaven;
No matter if they have not striven,
In *love* they may the victory win;
Sinned they with knowledge and with will?
In *love* they have a refuge still!

AGNES.

Yes, that is false. . . . And yet must I
Ask sometimes, Is it all a lie?

BRAND.

This they forget: the Will must first
For justice slake the law's stern thirst;
Must will, not only what we rate
As possible, in small or great,—
Not merely through the task involved
Its sum of trouble and of pain,—
But through a lengthening terror-chain
The Will must pass, content, resolved.
It is not martyrdom to die
Upon the cross in agony;

But this: to *will* the cross's death,—
To will when flesh gives up its breath,
To will, when spirit falls aghast,—
Then first we hold salvation fast!

AGNES (*clinging close to him*).

When the Demand makes pale my cheek
O then, my hero-husband, speak!

BRAND.

When Will has won in such a strife,
Then comes indeed the time for Love;
Then it descends like Noah's dove
Bearing the olive-leaf of life.
But towards a time grown slack and late
A man's best love is liker hate. [*In horror.*
Hate! In that one, small word is hurled
Defiance to the whole wide world.
[*Goes hastily into the house.*

AGNES (*looking through the open door*).

He kneels beside his darling child,—
As if with sobs, he rocks his head,
And presses close against the bed
As one whom helpless woe makes wild.—
O what a wealth of love this strong,
This stern and manly soul, can feel!
He *dares* love Alf! not yet that heel
Has felt the serpent bite of wrong.
[*Exclaims in terror.*
He wrings his hands! springs up in fright!—
What is it? He is ashen white!

BRAND (*out on the steps*).

Is there no message?

AGNES.

None is brought.

BRAND (*looking back into the house*).

His tense skin burns—his breath is caught—
His temples throb and pulses stir;—
O, fear not, Agnes!

AGNES.

God, what thought——

BRAND.

Fear not—

[*Calling out down the road.*

I see a messenger!

A MAN (*across the garden wicket*).

Now, master, you must come!

BRAND (*in haste*).

With speed.—

What is your message?

THE MAN.

One, indeed,
Not altogether clear: in bed
She raised herself, and as she leant,
" Go, get the priest; I'll give," she said,
" The half my goods, for sacrament."

BRAND (*falling back*).

Not *half!* Unsay that!

THE MAN (*shaking his head*).

If I did,
I should not say what I was bid.

BRAND.

The half! the half! . . . 'Twas *all* she meant.

THE MAN.

Maybe; but 'twas a good, round tone.
I don't let slip what once I've heard.

BRAND (*seizing him by the arm*).

On the last day before God's throne,
Dare you bear witness to that word?

THE MAN.

Aye.

BRAND (*firmly*).

Go, and tell the answer sent:
Comes neither priest nor sacrament.

THE MAN (*looking doubtfully at him*).

Ah, then you didn't catch the name;
It's from your mother, that I came.

BRAND.

No double-dealing law have I
For strangers and for family.

THE MAN.

That's a hard word.

BRAND.

The message sought,
She knew, was one of All or Naught.

THE MAN.

But parson——

BRAND.

Say the golden calf
Is still an idol, split in half.

THE MAN.

Well I'll e'en break the answer's blow
As gently as it may be done.
She's got one comfort left, I know,
That God's less hard than her own son! [*Goes.*

BRAND.

A comfort, that, whose tainted breath
Pursues mankind with plague and death!
Small pains, a judge's mouth to stuff
With hymns or cries, when need is sore.
Of course the theory's right enough;
These people know their man of yore;
His works all show, the dotard's mind
Is not to haggling disinclined.

[THE MAN *has met a* SECOND MAN *on the road; they both come back together.*

BRAND.

More news!

THE FIRST MAN.

Aye.

BRAND.

Give your message, man!

THE SECOND MAN.

Nine-tenths, this time the offer ran.

BRAND.

Not *all?*

THE SECOND MAN.

Not all.

BRAND.

My answer's sent:
Comes neither priest nor sacrament.

THE SECOND MAN.

She's toiled and moiled to earn it for you.—

THE FIRST MAN.

Remember, priest, it's she that bore you!

BRAND (*clenching his hands*).

I dare not use two sorts of weight
For those I love and those I hate.

THE SECOND MAN.

Her need is deep, her soul is stirred!
Come or else send some gentle word!

BRAND (*to the First Man*).

Go tell the sick as I have said:
Clean board for mercy's wine and bread!

[*The men go.*

AGNES (*clinging to him*).

Sometimes I tremble, seeing you, Brand,
Flame like a sword in the Lord's hand.

BRAND (*in a sobbing voice*).

Does not the world upon me press
With emptied scabbard at the hip?
Bleeds not my soul beneath the grip
Of its dull dogged stubbornness?

AGNES.

Hard were your terms: you did not spare.

BRAND.

Give milder ones if so you dare.

AGNES.

Mete with this measure whom you will,
And see if they the test fulfil.

BRAND.

There is an awful truth in that.
So empty, mean, ignoble, flat
Have all our life's ideals grown.
A man ranks high who even offers
By will the contents of his coffers,
And leaves the donor's name unknown.
But bid the hero hide his name
And rest content with victory:
Bid king and kaiser do the same—
What great achievement will you see?
Or bid the bard obscure, alone
Uncage the song-bird from his heart,
That none suspect the song, the art,
The golden plumage, are his own . . .
Seek in the withered tree or green,
Where shall self-sacrifice be seen?
Through all one earthly strain prevails;
Where death's abyss yawns deep and deeper,
Each clings to life's poor, dusty creeper;
That snapped, each random spray that trails
He claws and clutches with his nails!

AGNES.

And yet as helplessly they fall,
You cry to them your Naught or All!

BRAND.

He yields not who would win the fight;
From deepest fall he scales the height.
[*He is silent a moment; his voice changes.*
Yet as before some soul I stand,
And face it with the high demand,—
'Tis as on one frail spar I lay,
A tempest-driven castaway!
Alone, in tears, I bite the tongue
Whose lash some weaker soul has wrung;
And as I lift the arm to smite,—
O, I would fondle, if I might!
Go, Agnes, see to him who sleeps;
Sing him a-dreaming, calm and bright;
For a child's soul is soft and clear
As is a sun-lit summer-mere;
And over it a mother sweeps
Smooth as a bird whose noiseless flight
Is mirrored in the deep of deeps.

AGNES (*pale*).

Where'er you send your thoughts to, Brand,
They still turn back upon the child . . .

BRAND.

Nay,—watch him well and softly.

AGNES.

Give
A watchword for me.

BRAND.

Stern?

AGNES.

No, mild.

BRAND (*embracing her*).

He that is void of sin shall live.

AGNES (*looks brightly up at him and says*)

One treasure God dare not demand!
[*Goes into the house.*

BRAND (*gazes silently before him*).
But if He dared demand? God dare
What He bade Isaac's sire prepare . . .
[*Shakes the thought off.*
No, no! My sacrifice was made
When from me my life's Call I laid:
To be God's bolt, in thunder hurled,
To wake the slumberers of the world . . .
Lies, lies! No sacrifice was there:
That failed me, when the dream went by,
And Agnes waked me,—came to share
My labours in obscurity. [*Looks out over the road.*
Still, still delays that simple sentence
Of sacrifice and of repentance
That shall my mother's sin uproot
To its last fibre, wildest shoot.—
There!—No, that's just the Sheriff's form,
Good natured, brisk, and stout and warm,
With deep-plunged hands that give his jacket's
Parenthesis a pair of brackets.

THE SHERIFF (*across the garden gate*).
Good-day! We rarely meet; but still—
Unless my time is chosen ill—

BRAND (*motioning him to the house*).
Step in.

THE SHERIFF.
No, thank you; here will do.
Now, welcome in my errand, too,
And I'm convinced that it will tend
To serve all parties, in the end.

BRAND.
Name it.

THE SHERIFF.
I hear—to waste no breath—
Your mother's lying sick to death.
I'm sorry.

BRAND.
That I do not doubt.

THE SHERIFF.

I'm *very* sorry!

BRAND.

Well, speak out!

THE SHERIFF.

Well, well! she's old; good Lord, we must
Come one and all, some day, to dust . . .
So, as I just was passing by,
One needn't make two bites, thought I,
Of any cherry; and in short,
I hear a widely spread report
That since you settled here, you two
Have had a family to-do——

BRAND.

What do you mean?

THE SHERIFF.

She keeps fast hold,
They say, of all her goods and gold,
For you, that goes beyond a jest.
One must consult one's interest.
She keeps the whole away from you,—
Your patrimony, household gods,
And all——

BRAND.

She keeps the whole; that's true.

THE SHERIFF.

That soon puts relatives at odds.
So you, I take it, in a state
Of equanimity await
Her final hour—and so without
Offence, I trust, will hear me out,—
Though scarce in season, I allow.

BRAND.

All's one, another time or now.

THE SHERIFF.

To business, then, without delay
When once your mother's passed away,
Laid duly in the churchyard,—which
Must needs soon happen,—you'll be rich.

BRAND.

You think so?

THE SHERIFF.

Think? I know in short!
Why, she owns land in every bight
Far as a telescope can sight.
Rich, yes!

BRAND.

Despite the Probate Court?

THE SHERIFF.

Why that? It only has to square
Disputes when there's a rival heir:
Here none has any claim to share.

BRAND.

And what if still there should appear
A co-heir to the debts and pelf
With, I'm the proper man: give here!

THE SHERIFF.

'Twould have to be the fiend himself!
Aye, you may stare, but it is true;
No man has here a word to say;
Rely on me; I know the way.
Well then: you'll be as well-to-do,—
A wealthy man! You won't endure
Longer, this hole-and-corner cure;
'Twill open the whole land to you.

BRAND.

One moment: does your inward sense,
Put short, amount to this: Go hence?

THE SHERIFF.

About. I fancy, if you would,
'Twould tend towards all parties' good.
If you will closely scan the herd
To whom you now dispense the Word,
You're like a wolf, you must confess,
Put side by side with goose and gander.—
You're no perverse misunderstander:
I mean, the powers that you possess
To get their proper opportunity
Require a really large community;
They can but harm poor folks who rally
To names like " Children of the Cleft,"—
And who, for heritage, are left
The narrow confines of a valley.

BRAND.

In a man's native place his foot
Springs as the tree springs from its root.
If *there* his labours fill no need
Sung is his song and doomed his deed.

THE SHERIFF.

A man who to great deeds aspires
Must first look what his land requires.

BRAND.

Better from mountain heights to look
Than from a hill-bound valley-nook.

THE SHERIFF.

Tell great communities that tale;
Spare it our pauper-peopled vale.

BRAND.

O, you! what barriers you erect
'Twixt mountain and low-lying land!
The rights of empires you demand,
Yet every duty you neglect
Of large or small community,
And with this craven cry go free:—
We are a little people, we!

THE SHERIFF.

Things have their day; each generation
Has its peculiar occupation.
Our township cast its mite, you know,
In the world's exploit-treasuries,—
Of course it was long years ago,—
A mite of very decent size.
'Tis now a poky little place,
But its old fame lives on in story;
The period of its vanished glory
Was in King Bele's good old days.
There's many a merry tale of yore
About the brothers Ulf and Thor,
And doughty men, that by the score,
To British coasts a-harrying went
And plundered to their heart's content.
The trembling Southron cried, " Good Lord,
Preserve us from these ruffians' sword! "
These ruffians were, despite all doubts,
Just men who came from hereabouts.
They were the men for vengeance, parson!
They dealt out butchery and arson.
One hero of the Lord there was,
So legends run, who took the cross:
It is not mentioned that he started—

BRAND.

He's left descendants, this departed
Hero of promise?—

THE SHERIFF.

Yes, that's so;
He has; but how came you to know?

BRAND.

O, well, one would not feel at loss
Some heroes of to-day to find
Whose promising and taking cross,
If not his kin, are just his kind.

THE SHERIFF.

Well, well; the stock is still among us . . .
But we were on King Bele's tracks.—
First, then, on foreign shores we flung us,
Then visited with edge of axe
Our neighbours' and our kinsmen's land;
Their crops we trampled, and set fire
To many a homestead and church spire,
And crowned ourselves with exploits grand.
Perhaps there has been too much crowing
Over the blood all this set flowing;
Still, on these facts, I surely may
Point to our noble past, and say
There's all the proof one could require
That this our township, now declined,
Has done its part with sword and fire
Towards the progress of mankind.

BRAND.

There is one motto you forget:
Nobility implies a debt.
King Bele's age, its spears and arrows,
You bury under ploughs and harrows.

THE SHERIFF.

By no means. Pray go round and mark
Those parties here where I'm a guest,
And where the bailiff and the clerk
Are generally in request:
You'll soon see, when the punch comes on,
King Bele's memory isn't gone.
By toasts and songs and clinking beakers
And all our after-dinner speakers,
We still commemorate his fame;
And I myself, when so inclined,
At times of inspiration, wind
My flowers of fancy round his name,
And elevate the local mind.
I own I take a bit of pleasure
In poetry; our country side
Is with me there,—but all in measure:
In *life* it cannot be a guide.

It's only just an aftermath
'Twixt seven and ten o' nights when neighbours
Are free, and tired with all their labours,
And need an elevating bath.—
See here's the difference between us:
Together you would plough and fight,
And both of them with all your might;
As far as I can see, you mean us
Life and Ideals to unite;
Bring this crusade, which you set going,
In union with potato-growing,
Complete as sulphur and salt-petre
In powder,—or perhaps completer!

BRAND.

Perhaps.

THE SHERIFF.

Well, here it's out of question,
Leave us to plough our highland marish
And find some more extended parish.
There, 'twere a plausible suggestion.

BRAND.

First, plough into the sea outright
Your boasts of ancestors defiant;
A dwarf will never reach man's height,
Though his great-grandsire were a giant.

THE SHERIFF.

Old memories hold the seed of growth—

BRAND.

When deeds those memories avouch;
You behind Viking-barrows crouch
To screen your own degenerate sloth.

THE SHERIFF.

I end as I began; I say
It's best for you to go away.
Your work will never come to good
Here, nor your views be understood.

Such little flights as now and then
May be achieved by toiling men,—
Such elevation as may be,—
You can securely leave to me.
I have a record which bears witness
To my official zeal and fitness;
The population's doubled—trebled—
As I was happily enabled
To point new methods of subsistence.
Though Nature here shows stout resistance,
We've made grand headway in the strife;
Bridges and roads, to shorten distance—

BRAND.

Not one between belief and life.

THE SHERIFF.

'Twixt fiord and mountain-top or near it!

BRAND.

But not between the flesh and spirit.

THE SHERIFF.

First, roads facilitating movement
'Twixt house and house: so much at least
We all agreed was an improvement
Till you came here to be the priest.
Now you've turned all into confusion;
Our candles ape the Northern Light.
In such a cross-light of illusion
Who can distinguish wrong from right,
Or help from hindrance disentangle?
You've set all harmony a-jangle.
Split up your flock, and made them wrangle,
Who must, to win the day, unite.

BRAND.

You must put up with me, I fear.
The labourer cannot choose his sphere.
Each man has felt, who dares aspire,
Written in characters of fire,
The word divine: Your place is here!

THE SHERIFF.

Well, stay; but keep your proper bound.
Root out—to that I've no objection—
The crime and vice that here are found:
God knows, there's room in that direction.
But don't go making holy-days
Of all the working six, nor raise
A flag as if you'd God aboard
On every sloop that sails the fiord.

BRAND.

For your advice to serve, my soul
I needs must change, and change its goal:
Man's mission is *himself* to be,
Bear his own cause to victory;
And I will have the light from mine
About my native place to shine.
I will awake the people's mind,
Lulled by you leaders fast asleep;
Long has your narrow cage confined
What mountain-nature still they keep;
Their souls, dejected and subdued,
Are starved upon your petty food;
You've drained the best of all their blood;
The marrow of their hardihood;
To fragments you have ground and pounded
Hearts that of iron should be founded.
But soon a voice, now faint and far,
Shall thunder in your hearing. War!

THE SHERIFF

War?

BRAND.

War!

THE SHERIFF.

Well, sound your battle-call,
You'll be yourself the first to fall.

BRAND.

One day God's proof shall be complete
That highest victory is defeat.

THE SHERIFF.

You stand at parting ways: think hard:
Don't stake your all upon one card!

BRAND.

I will!

THE SHERIFF.

Then, if the game is lost,
Your wasted life will be the cost.
You've all the joys that earth can give,
Heir to a wealth that's worth possessing,
You have a child for whom to live,
A wife you love: kind hands seem pressing
Upon you blessing after blessing.

BRAND.

And what if still I turn my back
On all these joys of which you speak?
What if I *must?*

THE SHERIFF.

All's up, alack!
If here in this sequestered creek
Begins your universal war!
Go south, to richer shores, afar,
Where men dare lift to heaven their brows;
Them you may reasonably rouse,—
Announce a meeting,—even get
The congregation to be bled:
Our offering is not blood but sweat
Which turns these stubborn rocks to bread.

BRAND.

Here I will stay. Here lies my home;
Here I will fight and overcome.

THE SHERIFF.

What you let slip bethink you first,
What lose, if you should get the worst.

BRAND.

I lose myself if I should yield.

THE SHERIFF.

Brand, how can one man hold the field?

BRAND.

I have our better men with me.

THE SHERIFF (*smiling*).

But I have the majority. [*Goes.*

BRAND (*looking after him*).

There goes a perfect, thorough-bred
Man of the people: fair in head,
And warm in heart: well-meaning, plain,
Active according to his light,—
Yet to his native land a bane!
No flood or landslip, blast or blight,
No famine, pestilence or frost,
Leaves half the havoc in its wake
That he does, any day almost.
All these, it is but life they take;
But he,—how many a thought is killed,
How many a fresh resolve is damped,
How many a sturdy anthem stilled
By such a narrow soul and cramped!
What smiles upon the people's lips,
What gleams within the people's breast,
Has he not hastened to eclipse;
What noble rage that, unsuppressed,
Had flowered in action, has not he
Slain with a bloodless butchery.
[*In sudden anxiety.*
The message! Still no message brought!
Ah, here's the doctor! [*He hurries to meet him.*
Speak! My mother?

THE DOCTOR.

Judge not. She stands before Another.

BRAND.

Dead!—But repentant?

THE DOCTOR.

Not a thought.
She clung to worldly gear, whole-hearted,
Till the hour struck, and they were parted.

BRAND (*looks before him, silently moved*).

Is this a poor soul cast away,
A soul that has been long astray?

THE DOCTOR.

She may have judgment in God's sight,
Not by the law but by her light.

BRAND (*in a low voice*).

What were her words?

THE DOCTOR.

She murmured once:
God's hand is lighter than my son's!

BRAND (*sinks down on the bench in anguish*).

In sin's and death's last agony
The soul still strangled by that lie!
[*Hides his face in his hands.*

THE DOCTOR

(*goes nearer, looks at him, and shakes his head*).

You would entirely re-instate
An age that now is out of date.
You think that covenant of God's
With man still holds, whereas 'tis plain
Each age its predecessor stales;
You can't scare ours with flaming rods
And stolen souls in nursery tales;
Its motto runs: Be first humane!

BRAND (*looks up*).

Humane! That word's relaxing whine
Is now the whole world's countersign!
It serves the weakling to conceal
The abdication of his will;
With it the laggard cloaks the sin
That dares not venture all to win;

With it for sanction and for token
The craven's word is lightly broken.
You puny souls will make of man
A mere humanitarian!
Was God humane to Jesus Christ?
Salvation had been cheaplier priced
Had *your* God ruled: the Crucified
For mercy from the cross had cried,
And our redemption had been given
By diplomatic note from heaven!
[*He hides his head and sits in speechless sorrow.*

THE DOCTOR (*softly*).

Aye, spend your rage, you storm-tost deep;
'Twere best if you could learn to weep.

AGNES

(*has come out on the steps; she whispers, pale and in terror, to the doctor*)

Come in with me!

THE DOCTOR.

You make me start!
What is it, child?

AGNES.

A snake of fear
Is coiling cold about my heart . . .

THE DOCTOR.

What fear?

AGNES (*dragging him with her*).

God help us! Come in here!
[*They go into the house:* BRAND *does not notice.*

BRAND (*in quiet abstraction*).

Gone, unrepentant to her Judge!
Does not God's finger beckon clear?
For now that treasure which she lost
Must be redeemed at my sole cost.
Woe's me indeed, if now I budge! [*He rises.*

Here round my home, a duteous son,
I, from this hour resolved afresh,
Will strike till this crusade be done
For spirit's victory over flesh!
In me the bale-fires of the Lord
Are lit, my tongue shall be His sword;
Now in my own strength and my will's
I feel that I can crush these hills!

THE DOCTOR

(*comes out hurriedly on to the steps, followed by* AGNES, *and cries*)

Pack, and go hence, for Heaven's sake!

BRAND.

Not though the earth beneath me shake!

THE DOCTOR.

Stay, then, and doom your child to death.

BRAND (*distractedly*).

What, Alf! the boy!—what horror's breath
Is on me now? My child, my child!
[*Starts to go into the house.*

THE DOCTOR (*holding him back*).

Stop!—In this dark and sunless wild
The air seems from the Arctic pole,
And clammy-closing mists are rife:
Another winter in this hole
Will wither up his tender life.—
Travel will save you from this sorrow;
But soon,—if possible, to-morrow!

BRAND.

To-day—this moment—will we go!
O strong and tall he yet shall grow!
No gust from glacier or from shore
Shall freeze his little bosom more.—
Come, Agnes, wrap him in his sleep;
We'll fly, we'll fly, by strait and sound!
O, Agnes, Agnes! death is spinning
This web our little one around!

AGNES.

I nursed a terror, silent, deep;
And yet I saw but the beginning.

BRAND (*to the* DOCTOR).

But flight will save him? That you swear?

THE DOCTOR.

The life that is a father's care
By night and day, can danger dare.
You soon will see him strong and brown;
Be all to him, and fear no more.

BRAND.

Thanks, thanks!
(*To* AGNES).
But wrap him close in down:
The evening wind now sweeps the shore.
[AGNES *goes into the house.*

THE DOCTOR

(*silently contemplates* BRAND, *who is standing motionless, looking in through the door; presently he goes up to him, lays a hand on his shoulder, and says*)

What! to your flock so merciless,
For self so soon to pity wrought!
For them no talk of more or less,
But law, mere law, the All or Naught;
But you lose courage in a trice
When for yourself the die is thrown,
And when the lamb for sacrifice
Is not another's but your own!

BRAND.

What do you mean?

THE DOCTOR.

Your mother heard
Only the hard law's thundered word:
Lost, if a fragment you would save!
You must go naked to the grave! . . .
And the same cry has rung out loud
In the worst sufferings of the crowd.

Now you yourself in shipwreck feel
Fate's storm beat on your upturned keel:
Forthwith to wind and wave are sent
Your rescripts about punishment,
Flung wide that heavy book that pressed
So hard on many a bruised breast:
Enough with this stiff breeze at strife,
Enough to save your offspring's life!
You fly, by fiord and creek, you fly;
Leave your own mother's corpse to lie;
Leave flock and mission in the lurch;
'Tis now the parson shuts the church!

BRAND

(*clutching distractedly at his head as if to collect his thoughts*).

Am I blind *now*, or was I then?

THE DOCTOR.

As father, you're like other men.
Don't think I blame the kindly leaven!
Thus clipped, you seem to me at length
Greater than in your greatest strength.—
I've handed you the glass; good-bye;
Look at yourself in it, and sigh:—
So looks a man who'd fain storm heaven!

[*He goes.*

BRAND

(*gazes before him for a moment; suddenly exclaims*)

What if the fall were *here*, not there!

[AGNES *comes out of the door with a cloak over her shoulders and the child in her arms.* BRAND *does not see her. She is about to speak, but stops as if terror-struck when she catches sight of the expression on his face. At the same moment a* MAN *comes hastily through the garden wicket. The sun goes down.*

THE MAN.

Priest, you've an enemy! Beware.

BRAND (*clenching his hand against his breast*)

Yes, *here!*

THE MAN.

The Sheriff is the man!
Your seed was springing, left and right,
Until the Sheriff's gossip ran
And struck the green blades with a blight.
He's spread the whisper, far and near,
The parsonage will soon be clear;
He says, you'll turn your back and go,
Once your rich mother's laid below.

BRAND.

And if it were so?—

THE MAN.

Priest, I know you,
And whence these slander-weeds have grown;
You've stood against him, you alone;
He's grappled and he could not throw you,
And that's a grudge he'll always owe you.

BRAND (*hesitatingly*).

There might be truth . . . in what he spread . . .

THE MAN.

Then you have lied before us all.

BRAND.

I, lied? . . .

THE MAN.

How often have you said
That God had roused you to this Call,—
That here with us you have your home,—
That it is here you'll overcome,—
That man must hold his mission's field,
Strike blow on blow and never yield?
Yours is the Call! for strong and bright
Your fire's in many a breast alight.

BRAND.

Man, here the crowd is deaf and blind;
Quenched down and dulled is every mind.

THE MAN.

Nay, you know better; many a one
Has caught a glimpse of heaven and sun.

BRAND.

In tenfold more is gloomy night.

THE MAN.

You are the lamp that gloom to light.
But let all this be as it may,
There is no need to count, I say;
For here stand I, a single man,
And say, Desert me if you can!
I, too, have got a soul; I look
To you to help me with the Book;
'Tis you that dragged me from the deep;—
Now, see if you dare let me slip! . . .
You cannot! Firm I hold as oak;
My soul were lost if this hold broke!—
Farewell. I know I shall not see
My priest leave go of God and me! [*He goes.*

AGNES (*timidly*).

Your cheek is white, your lips are paled—
'Tis as the heart within you wailed!

BRAND.

Each word he flung against the height
Smites me with tenfold echo's might.

AGNES (*takes a step forward*).

I am prepared!

BRAND.

For what!

AGNES (*stoutly*).

To fill
The place a mother must and will!
[GERD *is running past on the road outside; she stops at the gate.*

GERD

(*clapping her hands and crying out in wild glee*).

Have you heard? The Priest is flitting!—
Out from hills and up from knolls
Throng the Kelpies and the Trolls,
Great and small and black and wry!—
Eh! what imps they are for hitting—
They have all but clutched my eye!
Half my soul long since they stole;
I make shift with half a soul.—
Well! it serves me for the whole!

BRAND.

Wandering are your thoughts and wild:
See, I stand before you, child!

GERD.

You? Aye you; but not the Priest!
Down from Blackfell, fierce and fast,
Hissing on the blackening blast,
Down the steeps my hawk has flitted:
He was saddled, he was bitted;
Rode a man upon the beast,—
That was he, the Priest, the Priest!
Now the parish church is barred,
Locked and bolted, fast and hard;
Well, 'twas mean; its sun is set;
Now *my* church its place shall get.—
There the priest stands, great and glad,
In his snowy surplice clad,
Woven of the winter wet:
Would you see? The way's not hard;
And . . . the parish church stands barred!
My priest's mighty words are hurled
Ringing over all the world!

BRAND.

Child, who sent you here to daze
With the idols of your craze?

GERD (*coming inside the garden wicket*).

Idols? What is that you call
Idol? Ah, I understood!

Sometimes great and sometimes small,
Always gilded, always grand.
Idols! See her, you who spoke:
Can you spy beneath her cloak
Baby feet—a baby's hand?
Can you see how fine and grand
Something nestles in the wraps?—
'Tis a sleeping child, perhaps?—
Look, she hides it in a scare . . .
Idols? Man, you see one there!

AGNES (*to* BRAND).

Can you find a prayer, a tear?
Mine the terror seems to sear!

BRAND.

Agnes, helpmate . . . O, 'tis clear
That a greater sent her here!

GERD.

Listen: all the bells are tolling
On the wild, wild height together!
Up the churchway crowds come rolling,
Look you, as a river rolls!
Can you see the thousand Trolls,
Gnomes and birds of kindred feather?
Parson sank them in the waves;
Buried deep they lay there long,
With his seal for ward and watch;
Now they burst from out their graves,
Cold and clammy, up they throng;
Baby-trolls he did but scotch,
Grin, and lift the boulders high . . .
Mother, Father!—hear, they cry;
Men and women make reply:
There's a parish-man that runs
Like a sire to greet his sons;
There's a woman takes her dead,
Lets them from her breast be fed,—
Stalking with as proud a tread
As to christening sacrament.—
Life came here, when Parson went!

BRAND.

Hence! I see come following after
Wilder visions—

GERD.

Hear his laughter,
His that by the road is sitting
Where it twists towards the height:
In his book he hastes to write,
Every soul that hurries past—
Ha! he's got them all at last!
And the parish church stands barred,
Locked, and bolted, fast and hard,—
And the Parson he is sitting
On the back o' the hawk, and flitting!
[*She leaps over the gate and is lost among the screes.*
Silence.

AGNES (*approaches* BRAND *and says below her breath*)

Let us go, for time is dear.

BRAND (*gazing at her*).

Yes, but whither?
[*Pointing first to the garden gate, then to the house door.*
Here? Or here?

AGNES (*drawing back aghast*).

Brand, your child!—

BRAND (*following her up*).

Give answer rather:
Was I priest ere I was father?

AGNES (*drawing further back*).

Were that word in thunder pealed
Answer here I could not yield!

BRAND (*following her again*).

But you must! 'Tis you, the mother,
Have the last word here, none other!

AGNES.

I am helpmeet; I obey
If the word you dare to say!

BRAND (*trying to grasp her arm*).

Take this choice's cup from me!

AGNES (*drawing back behind a tree*).

Then were mine no mother's voice.

BRAND.

There the judgment struggled free!

AGNES (*boldly*).

Think if here you *have* a choice.

BRAND.

There it spoke with fuller breath!

AGNES.

Trust you wholly in God's call?

BRAND (*gripping her hand*).

Aye! And now from you shall fall
The one word for life or death!

AGNES.

Ask thy God . . . Go where He saith! [*A pause.*

BRAND.

Let us go; the way lies clear.

AGNES (*in a lifeless tone*).

Whither leads it? [BRAND *is silent.*

AGNES (*pointing to the garden gate*).

Here?

BRAND (*pointing to the house door*).

No, *here!*

AGNES (*lifting the child high in her arms*).

God! What Thou dar'st ask for, I
Dare to lift towards Thy sky!
Lead me through life's shuddering night!
[*Goes into the house.*

BRAND

(*gazes a moment before him; bursts into tears; clasps his hands above his head, flings himself down on the steps and cries out*)

Jesus, Jesus! give me light!

FOURTH ACT

Christmas Eve in the parsonage. The room is dark. In the wall at the back is the house-door; in one side wall a window, in the other a door. AGNES, *in mourning, stands at the window, gazing out at the darkness.*

AGNES.

Still no sign of his returning!
O, to wait, and wait, and strain—
Send out cry on cry of yearning—
Still no answer to regain! . . .
Thick and heavy falls the snow:
It has clad the old church roof
In a hood of whitest woof— [*Listens.*
Hark! I hear the wicket go! . . .
Steps! A man's firm footsteps, too!
[*Hastens to the door and opens it.*
O, come in! It's you, it's you!

[BRAND *comes in, covered with snow, in travelling dress, which he takes off during what follows.*

AGNES (*throwing her arms round him*).

O, how long you were away!
Do not leave me, do not leave me!
Lone, I have no strength to fight
Those black shadows of the night,
That beset me and deceive me!
What a night, what days were they
Which have kept you from my sight!

BRAND.

Child, you have me back again.
[*He lights a single candle, which casts a faint light over the room.*
You are pale.

AGNES.

And tired, and sad,
With the watching and the strain . . .
So, I've bound some leaves together,—
Few, but they were all I had,—
Nursed through all the winter weather
Just to deck the Christmas tree:
This, I said the bush should be,
And he has it—for a wreath! [*Bursts into tears.*
See it, there, half lost beneath
The thick snow that wraps it round,
In—O God—

BRAND.

The burial ground.

AGNES.

O, that word! . . .

BRAND.

Those tear-drops dry! . . .

AGNES.

O, be patient, and I will.
But my heart is bleeding still,—
Fresh the wound, the agony,—
And no store of strength have I . . .
O, but I will soon recover:
Once these Christmas days are over
You shall never see me weeping.

BRAND.

What, is *that* Christ's birthday keeping?

AGNES.

O, be patient! I have tried.—
Only . . . last year strong and sound,
This year taken from my side—
Taken— [*She shrinks from the word*

BRAND (*sternly*).

To the burial ground.

AGNES (*shrieks*).

Name it not!

BRAND.

With full-mouthed speech
Must I, if you dread the sound,
Name it till it thunders round
Like a wave upon the beach!

AGNES.

You too flinch beneath its stress
More than you would fain confess:
For your forehead with the sweat
Which it cost you still is wet.

BRAND.

'Tis but spray upon my brow,
Blown from the rough fiord, just now.

AGNES.

And the drop that dims your eye
Melted snowflake, from the sky?—
No, it is too warm! 'Twas pressed
From a spring in your own breast!

BRAND.

Agnes, helpmeet! Let us bear
All the brunt, unflinching stand,—
Lay your strength and mine together,
So win forward, hand in hand! . . .
O, I was a man out there,
Buffeting with wind and weather!
There we lay, in the mid-fiord:
On the reef the breakers roared:
Even the sea-mews, overcome,
In the tempest's scowl were dumb:
Hailstones flogged the little craft:
Seethed the waters fore and aft:

Mast and tackle creaked astrain:
Torn to tatters, blew the sail
Far alea on the white main:
Groaned the boat at every nail:
Plunging sheer to the deep fiord,
Mountain-avalanches roared;
Eight men, lying on their oars,
Looked as each were grown a corse! . . .
Then beside the helm I *grew*,
Then, ah then my mandate knew—
Knew myself baptized indeed
To this call for which we bleed!

AGNES.

Easy to stand firm in strife—
Easy is a battling life:
Think of me, the lonely sitter
'Mid the still small sparrow-twitter
Of the thoughts I cannot deaden,
Through the hours that drag so leaden
Think of me, shut out of sight
Of the struggle's beacon light:
Think of me, who cannot ask
Aught beyond my petty task;
Think of me, beside the ember
Of a silent hearthstone set,
Where I dare not all remember
And I cannot all forget.

BRAND.

Hast thou petty task-work, thou?
Never was it great as now.
Hear, for I will tell a thing
I have won from suffering:
Oftentimes my eyes are fogged,
Heart oppressed and thinking clogged,
And it seems the one relief
Lies in weeping out my grief:
Agnes, then I see God near!
Near as never yet I knew Him—
O, so close, it would appear
Very easy to come to Him:

Then to cast myself, how sweet!
Like a foundling at His feet—
Only to be close, close pressed
To a Father's fostering breast!

AGNES.

Brand, O see Him always so!
As a God that thou canst know—
More the Father, less the Lord!

BRAND.

Agnes! Would'st thou dare to shirk
The hard highway of His work?
I must see Him with His sword—
High as heaven His mighty crest!
Aye, the times for greatness call
Just because they are so small! . . .
O, but *thou* may'st see Him near—
See Him as a Father dear;
Lay thy head upon His breast,
There, when thou art weary rest;
Calm and strong return, His grace
Still reflected in thy face;
Bearing me, in strife and stress,
Something of His loveliness.
Look you, Agnes! so to share
Is our wedlock's aim and end;
One shall battle, strive, defend;
For his wounds the other care.
So alone the words may run
Truly, that the two are one.
Ever since you left the life
Of the world to be my wife,—
Boldly cast your fortune's die,—
On your head the Call doth lie:
I fight on, and ever on;
Till the day be lost or won,—
In the scorching solstice fight,
Stand on watch in the cold night:
You shall stay aloof, above:
Fill me chalices of love,
Wrap me folds of tenderness

Under the steel fighting-dress:
'Tis no petty task, confess!

AGNES.

Every task that I would seek
Seems to find my strength too weak!
All the branches of my thought
Bound in one sad bundle seem . . .
Everything is as a dream . . .
Let me weep, till I have sought
For myself, my work, to borrow
Light from out the midst of sorrow.
Last night, while you were away,
Brand! I saw him in my room!
Health was on his cheek in bloom:
In his baby-shirt, half-clad,
Pattered in the little lad
Towards the bed where mother lay:
And he stretched his arms, my child!—
Called his mother's name and smiled,
As he would be warmed and cherished . . .
O, I shivered,—yes, I say—

BRAND.

Agnes! . . .

AGNES.

Yes, the child was perished!
It must freeze him to the bone
Where he lies, out there, alone! . . .

BRAND.

Lies the corse in the cold ground—
He, our child, is safe in heaven.

AGNES (*shrinking from him*).

O, you tear a bleeding wound—
Make my anguish seven times seven!
What the corse you harshly name
Is to me our darling still;
Soul and body are the same;
And I cannot, if I will,

See, like you, the two apart . . .
Both have places in my heart:
High in heaven, or deep in snow,
Alf is still the Alf I know!

BRAND.

Many a wound, now half congealed,
Must bleed more ere you be healed.

AGNES.

Be but patient with me, Brand!
Lead, not drive: 'tis better so!
Stand to nerve me close at hand
With the gentlest words you know.
You who speak in thunder's tone
In that moment, dread and great,
When the final die is thrown
For a soul's eternal fate,—
Knows your voice no note of mildness
That may calm a pang's first wildness?
Not a word to cheer the night
With some earnest of the light?
God, as you have known and taught Him,
Seems a king upon His throne:
O, what boldness, had I sought Him
With a lowly mother's moan!

BRAND.

Were it easier, then, to go
To the God you used to know?

AGNES.

Thither I return not, nay! . . .
Yet, at times, I have a feeling
Which beguiles me—sends me stealing
Where the light is, and the day! . . .
" Light to lift, but heavy to hold "—
Was not that the saying old?
Thy wide realms outstretch my soul:
All things here my spirit daze:
Thou, thy Call, thy course, thy goal,
And thy will, and all thy ways:

Fell, that overhangs our head:
Fiord, that bars where we would tread:
Struggle, gloom, remembrance—all
Huge,—the Church alone too small!

BRAND (*struck*).

Still that thought, which everywhere
Meets me! Is it in the air? . . .
Why too small?

AGNES (*shaking her head sadly*).

I cannot tell:
Cannot frame my reasons well.
Thoughts and feelings come and go
Wafted like a wind-borne scent:
Whence it came, and whither went—
That I ask not, only know
This, which knowledge scarce I call,
But I *feel* the Church too small!

BRAND.

There is vision in this dream
Of the people. I have caught
From a hundred lips one thought.
Even she, who strayed distraught
Up among the fells, let fall
This, the burden of her scream,
" It is mean, for it is small."
So it ran,—nor yet could she
Reason out her thought at all.
Scores of souls since then agree
" 'Tis too small, our Church, too small! "
More than idle talk, or raving—
Something deeper here was meant:
Yes, the cry expressed the craving
For a Mansion for our God.
Agnes! O, I see it well,—
You are she whom God hath sent
As His angel on my road!
True, unerring, you can tell
Even by dark the way, where I
Grope and pass the turning by!

Never by false light misled,
From the first you pointed clear
To my labour's truer sphere;
Checked me, when I soared instead,
Wild of wing, against the sky;
Checked, and turned my wandering eye
Homeward, soulward, inwardly!
Once again the light has broken
From a word your lips have spoken;
Led me, as astray I wandered;
Lit me, as obscure I pondered.
Aye, our Church is small; but wait!
It shall be rebuilded great.
Now I see in clearest view
What in you God deigned to give me;
And I supplicate, like you—
Do not leave me, do not leave me!

AGNES.

I will dry my tears, will straightway
Shake me free from grief and gloom!
Lock my heart, till every gateway
Learns its memories to entomb!
Put an ocean of forgetting
Between me and all my fretting;
From my little picture blot
Ruthlessly its one bright spot;
Be thy helpmeet, heart and soul!

BRAND.

Long the way, but great the goal!

AGNES.

Only spare to spur me, Brand.

BRAND.

I but voice the Lord's command.

AGNES.

His who, you have taught me, still
Not rejects the faltering will,
Though it cannot *all* fulfil. [*Turns to go.*

BRAND.

Going?

AGNES (*smiling*).

I must not neglect
All my Christmas housewifery!
Last year, do you recollect?
Spendthrift was your name for me:
Every taper was alight,
Toys were here, and greenery:
How we decked the Christmas tree!
How we laughed and sang that night! . . .
Brand, we'll keep the feast this year,—
Light once more the tapers all,—
Give our home a look of cheer
For the great calm festival:
Order all that so, should He
Peep into our chamber, God
Should a chastened daughter see,
Chastened son, that kiss the rod,
Nor presume to cast them down
Wholly, for a father's frown . . .
Where's a trace of weeping now?

BRAND (*pressing her to him and letting her go again*).

Child, bring light! 'tis you know how!

AGNES (*smiling sadly*).

Build the great church! Only, dear,
Build it ere the spring is here! [*She goes.*

BRAND (*looking after her*).

Willing, willing at the altar!
Willing at the martyr's stake.
Fails the strength? Does spirit falter?
Bend she will not, though she break!
Lay Thy strength to hers, O Lord!
And for me be never poured
This Thy bitterest cup, to fly
The Law's falcon, fell and fierce,
At her tender heart, to pierce—

Drink, and drain the heart's blood dry! . . .
Strength and courage, Lord, have I:
Double burden let me bear,
Be but merciful to her!

[*A knock at the door. Enter the* SHERIFF.

THE SHERIFF.

You see in me a beaten man.

BRAND.

How so?

THE SHERIFF.

And you're his overcomer!
Maybe you recollect, last summer,
When I was bent upon the plan
Of ousting you from here, I guessed
You'd not exactly get the best
Of our campaign that then began.

BRAND.

And now?

THE SHERIFF.

For all I'm in the right,
I won't continue with the fight.

BRAND.

And why is that?

THE SHERIFF.

Because you see
You now have the majority.

BRAND.

I have?

THE SHERIFF.

You know it, I don't doubt.
Folk flock to you by high and by-way;
And there's a spirit hereabout,
Which, Lord knows, doesn't hail from *my* way;
That being so, it needs no prophet
To guess that you're the author of it.—
Come here's my hand, sir; let's be friends!

BRAND.

A war like our war never ends—
Not even by one side disbanding!

THE SHERIFF.

What would you, more than fair amends
And peace and friendly understanding?
I'm not a man to kick the pricks:
One's made like most folks, in a fix:
And, when one's breast the sword-point feels,
One shows a tidy pair of heels.
A man who knows the time to budge'll
Run when it's lance against his cudgel,
And, single-handed in the field,
Discretion counsels one to yield.

BRAND.

Here are two questions, to my mind:
First, I'm the stronger man, you find:
I count more heads—

THE SHERIFF.

That's sure and fast.

BRAND.

Quite possibly; but at the last,
On the great Day of Offering
Whose cause will triumph?—That's the thing.

THE SHERIFF.

An Offering Day? You look too far.
That day's not in the calendar:
And when it comes, despite the shock, it's
A mere affair of people's pockets.—
Humaner creeds are now in fashion:
An altar's something to put cash on:
That's our extremest Cross and Passion!
And here's a point by which I'm vexed:
Among the rest, I've preached myself
On this humanitarian text,
Put sacrificing on the shelf,

And in a sense, as you may say,
I have just given myself away:
At least, I've put a rod in pickle for
Those enterprises which I stickle for.

BRAND.

You say you're in the right. Then, next,
A point on which I'm much perplexed,—
I'm still more curious to know
How can you dare give in, if so?
A man's created for his work:
His haven's Heaven: he may not shirk,
Though betwixt him and it should swell
A sea, and Satan's port lay neighbour:
How can he cry, " Have done with labour!
It's handier here: put in at Hell "?

THE SHERIFF.

I've yes and no for answer. Tack
One must, at times; at times put back,
And people do not now-a-days
Start off upon a wild-goose chase.
Whate'er we do, there's not a doubt of it,
We do want to get something out of it.
Once lose a pitched campaign, in fact,
The one alternative is—tact.

BRAND.

But tact will never make white black.

THE SHERIFF.

My worthy friend, what use to back
A thing for white, when all the town
Cries out, " It's black, as black as . . . snow! "

BRAND.

So you shout ditto, then?

THE SHERIFF.

No, no:
I shout, not black, but . . . whitey-brown.
Humanitarian is the day:
Folk meet each other now halfway,

Not run against each other, plump!
We're a free people—on the stump;
Where every man's as good as t'other
And one opinion like another.
Why press on all what *one* supposes
In questions such as black and white? . . .
In short upon a count of noses
It seems that you are in the right;
And so, like all the rest, I bow
To you, as well as I know how;
And hope that I incur no censure
For crying off my own adventure.
Of late, it's easy to be seen,
Folk think my labours small and mean:
The " One Thing Needful " seems a bigger
Thing than our harvest's yearly figure:
Now, when subscriptions I invite,
No man is ready with his mite;
And when the heart's not in the playing—
The game so played is lost, past praying.
Of course it goes against the grain
To send my scheme for draining bogs,
For roads and foreshores, to the dogs:
Those and much else that was in train.
But, Lord! least said is soonest healed;
If one can't conquer, one must yield;
Wait patiently on time and tide,
And bend discreetly to one side.
I've lost folks' favour now, that's plain,
And on the same road where I found it.
Well, well; then I must just go round it,
And so come by my own again.

BRAND.

Then all your cleverness and charity
Was exercised for popularity?

THE SHERIFF.

Lord! no; I wasn't so to blame;
My aim was just the general good—
The welfare of the neighbourhood.
But still I can't deny there came

Some thought of prospects in the game,—
Some looking for reward and praise
For work well done on working days.
A man of energy and brains
Will see some outcome for his pains,—
Not groan haphazard, for a bare
Idea, through all the wear and tear.
It's really not incumbent on me
To give the world my powers on loan
For *its* good and forget my own.
I've got a family upon me;
I have a wife, and daughters nine,
Whom I have got to think of first.
Ideas don't quench a body's thirst;
Ideas don't turn out bread and butter,
When you've a household, sir, like mine.
And if I find a man to utter
Surprise at this, I can but answer—
He's no good father, is that man, sir!

BRAND.

And now your plan is?—

THE SHERIFF.

Bricks and mortar.

BRAND.

What, build?

THE SHERIFF.

With you as a supporter,
To benefit myself and neighbours.
First, I must build up my renown,
The estimate of all my labours,
Which lately seems a little down.
Election time is close at hand,
And I must come at something grand,
Something to make the people talk,
If all supplanters I would baulk,
And keep myself the cock o' the walk.
Says I, a man that's steady-going
Will row the way the stream is flowing:
The craze is, being "elevated,"
As the phrase goes: there *I'm* checkmated;

I can but put folk on their legs,—
And that I can't do, willy-nilly
With my supporters all turned silly.
So one thing and another eggs
My brain to cope—if that maybe—
With our unhappy poverty.

BRAND.

Do you expect that you will cure it?

THE SHERIFF.

Nay, that's the last thing I expect!
Society's innate defect,
It's there, and we must just endure it.
Still, if some tactful means be used,
It may be limited, reduced,
Directed in a given channel.
We hear from every jury-panel
How Want's the best manure for crimes:
I mean to dam it up betimes.

BRAND.

But how?

THE SHERIFF.

Ah, you may well go guessing!
A long-felt want will now be filled,
And all the district reap the blessing,
If I can get the means to build
A Poor-house—Pest-house, if you like,
Since at the germs of crime 'twill strike.
This building, it is in my mind,
Might with a Lock-up be combined:
Thus we shall happily effect
The Cause, you see, with the Effect;
By the same bars securely fixed
With but a wall the cells betwixt.
Then, while I am about the thing,
I mean to add another wing,
For public buildings in the main meant,
But equally for entertainment;
With rooms for guests, and things of that form,
The whole completed by a platform;

In short to give a title to 't
A neat Political Institute.

BRAND.

All pressing needs. Yet I could fill
The list with one more pressing still.

THE SHERIFF.

Ah! you refer to an asylum?
True, true; it was my earliest scheme;
But when I asked my friends, my whilom
Intention vanished like a dream.
Where should we find the means to cope
With anything of such a scope?
For it would certainly consume
Vast sums, I take yourself to witness,
If everybody there found room
Who manifested signs of fitness!
One builds not only for one's self.
But with an eye to what betides
When we are laid upon the shelf.
Things go ahead with giant strides:
Each year demands a new extension:
You see yourself to what dimension
Our country's wants have grown: it shoots
Ahead with speed of seven-league boots
In every line you like to mention.
And so it comes too dear a joke
To provide room for future folk,
For all the world and all his wives.
So I just say, well, *that* tooth's broke;
And " needs must when the devil drives."

BRAND.

And, if some madman passes bounds,
There's still the great hall handy—

THE SHERIFF.

Zounds!
A happy thought! for that will bide,
On most days, quite unoccupied;
And so our building, we may state is
To give us an asylum *gratis ;*

And to one central focus drag,
Beneath the self-same roof and flag,
Each most important element
Which in our district's tone is blent:
To wit the army of the poor;
The deluge of the evil doer;
Our lunatics, who went careering
Before with no one to impede 'em;
And, last our fruits of public freedom—
Haranguing and electioneering;
Committee rooms for starting movements
About municipal improvements;
And space for public speech and pledge
About the people's heritage!
If once the plan achieves success,
Our hardy dalesmen will possess,
As far as lies within our giving,
All adjuncts to make life worth living.
God knows our riches are but small;
But, this once built, we well may call
A district, moderately sized
Like ours, at least well organized.

BRAND.

But what of funds?

THE SHERIFF.

Aye, there's the rub;
Funds are of every wheel the hub.
At talk of cash, the will grows slacker;
Without your help, the thing would drag
And I should have to strike my flag.
With you for orator and backer
The thing will go ahead like steam;
And on completion of the scheme,
I won't forget your help,—just try me.

BRAND.

In other words, you wish to buy me.

THE SHERIFF.

I should express my offer otherwise:
For mutual gain—the thing's two-sided—

To join in bridging, friend-and-brotherwise,
The gulf by which we stood divided,
And lost thereby—both you and I did.

BRAND.

Your time's ill-chosen——

THE SHERIFF.

Ah, I've heard
Of your sad loss; my judgment erred;
But 'twas your manliness misled it . . .
And pressing need of local credit . . .

BRAND.

In joy or sorrow I am found
Ready, I trust, for any need:
What I refer to is indeed
Another and a valid ground.

THE SHERIFF.

Which is?

BRAND.

That *I* have building plans.

THE SHERIFF.

You have? What, steal the scheme from me?

BRAND.

No, scarcely. [*Pointing out of the window.*
Sheriff, do you see? . . .

THE SHERIFF.

What?

BRAND.

That!

THE SHERIFF.

You mean, against the manse—
That great big ugly wooden house—
The cowshed for the parson's cows?

BRAND.

The *little* ugly one!

THE SHERIFF.
The *church!*

BRAND (*nodding*).
I shall rebuild it great.

THE SHERIFF.
Nay, nay—
The devil take your plan, I say!
'Twould leave mine nicely in the lurch!
Time presses: mine's at starting-point,
And yours would put it out of joint.
Give way!

BRAND.
I never yet gave way.

THE SHERIFF.
You *must*, man! Build my Institute,
My Poor-house, Pest-house—Jail, pray suit
Your own good taste in what you style 'em,—
In short, my Lunatic Asylum,—
Let the church be! Don't talk such stuff!
We used to find it good enough.

BRAND.
Perhaps; but now it is too small.

THE SHERIFF.
I've never seen it full, that's all!

BRAND.
It feels as if its petty size
Forbade a single soul to rise.

THE SHERIFF (*shaking his head in wonderment*).
Why can't the soul sit still, as *we* did?
This proves how my asylum's needed.
[*Changing his tone.*
Let the church stand, and spare expense!
Why, one may call it, in a sense,
Part of our noble heritage—
An heirloom from a grander age!

Destroy our heirloom you shall not!
Yes, if my project goes to pot,
Still I shall rise, as down it crashes,
Like a new Phœnix from its ashes!
The lists I enter, lance in hand,
For this old landmark of our village!
A heathen temple used to stand
Here, in King Bele's good old days;
The pious hero's sack and pillage
Left us this edifice in place;
Which, quaint, but hallowed by the glory
That hangs about its old-world story,
Has reared its head until this hour.

BRAND.

Yes, but these signs of ancient power
Were buried, surely, long ago,
And not a vestige left to show.

THE SHERIFF.

That's just the essence of its worth:
So old, 'tis vanished from the earth!
Though my old grandad could recall
A hole surviving in the wall.

BRAND.

A hole?

THE SHERIFF.

So big, 'twould take a cask.

BRAND.

And how much wall?

THE SHERIFF.

Nay, never ask.
But you must see that your suggestion
To pull it down is out of question.
The thing would be a shame, a scandal,
The act of an unheard-of vandal!
And then the money—do you dream
That folk are hereabout so reckless
As waste their cash upon a feckless,

Uncalled-for, and abortive scheme,
When with a little timely trouble,
A little thrifty underpropping,
We can prevent the old place dropping,
At least in our time, into rubble?
Well, reconnoitre; make a test of it;
But now it's *I* who'll get the best of it!

BRAND.

I will not beg one grudging groat
To build God's House. I spend my own.
All I inherit I devote
To raise the building, I alone.—
Now, Sheriff, are you still inclined
To try to make me change my mind?

THE SHERIFF (*folding his hands*).

I feel as if I'd just come tumbling
Down from the clouds! . . . Such things are rare
In towns: but in our valley where
The plainest needs set people fumbling
And pocket-buttoning and grumbling,
You turn a fountain on,—in fact,
A foaming, glittering cataract
Of generosity unbounded! . . .
I tell you, Brand, I stand dumbfounded!

BRAND.

In my own mind I long ago
Renounced the money,—

THE SHERIFF.

Did you so?
I've heard some whisper of the matter,
But put it down as idle chatter.
Folk only spend their all to earn
Some clear and tangible return.
However, that's your own affair;
Go on! I'll follow anywhere!
It's yours to manage; you're in feather;
I feel my way with you for guide!
Brand, we will build the church together!

BRAND.

What, will you let your own scheme slide?

THE SHERIFF.

Good Lord, I'd be an idiot not to!
Which man d'ye think the flock will trot to,
When one will spoil and stuff and fatten 'em,
And one will shear and squeeze and flatten 'em?
The devil take me if I'm not
Charmed with your project, nay, red-hot
Upon 't: the thing has fairly caught me:
'Twas some good providence that brought me
Up to the parsonage this day!
For, but for *my* scheme, I daresay
Yours had not struck you, not a word of it—
At least, the world had never heard of it.
So I may put it, fair and square,
This new church project is my own.

BRAND.

But stop,—we cannot spare a stone
Of our majestic ruin there?

THE SHERIFF (*looking out of the window*).

Viewed thus, the snow and moonlight vieing
To show it up, there's no denying
It looks a bit dilapidated— . . .

BRAND.

What, Sheriff?

THE SHERIFF.

Brand, it's antiquated!
And then what puzzles me the more
Is that I never saw before
How much the weathercock's aslant,—
We can't have that, we really can't!
Then, where is architecture, style,
When one looks close at roof and wall?
Those arches,—a professional,
I fancy, would pronounce them vile;
And I must frankly say, they are!

And then those moss-tufts,—I suppose
King Bele didn't leave us those!
No, piety can go too far;
It must be plain to everybody
The old wreck is altogether shoddy!

BRAND.

But if the people's voice protested
It would not have the church molested?

THE SHERIFF.

Then I should step into the breach!
This Christmas while the thing is warm,
I'll get it put in proper form
And push it forward, willy-nilly!
I'll agitate, with pen and speech!
You trust the Sheriff, sir, for bustling!
And if I can't collect, by hustling,
Hands for the work, and folk seem chilly—
Why, failing theirs, I'll use my own,
And pull the place down, stone by stone!
I'll take my wife, I'll take my daughters,
But down it comes, ten thousand slaughters!

BRAND.

That's quite another tone, you know,
From what you used awhile ago.

THE SHERIFF.

Our new Humanity's just this:
It does away with prejudice.
And then, unless the poet lies,
It really is a pretty thing,
The way that an idea takes wing
From one man to the next and flies——
Good-bye, *[Taking his hat.*
I've got that gang to see to.

BRAND.

What gang?

THE SHERIFF.

Just think, to-day I caught—
I and a man, there were but we two—
Some gypsies on the district's bounds:
A fiendish-looking crew, but zounds!
I had some cords and helpers brought,
And now they're safe and fast, no fear,
At your next neighbour's northward here.
Still, plague upon them, two or three
Made off, for all their heels were worth.

BRAND.

And bells ring in The Peace on Earth!

THE SHERIFF.

How came they here? that puzzles me.
Though to be sure, one might express it,
They're *ours*, nay *yours*, if you'll confess it . . .
[*Laughing.*
Come here's a riddle; try and guess it.
There's folks about, who owe their life
To her who was your father's wife;
Yet they're the offspring of another
Father by quite a different mother.

BRAND (*shaking his head*).

God knows, so many riddles press
For answer, yet go answerless.

THE SHERIFF.

But mine's an easy one to guess.
You must have heard, some time or other,
Some tale about a penniless
Young lad, here westward, with at least
As much book-learning as priest,
Who came a-courting to your mother . . .

BRAND.

Well?

THE SHERIFF.

Fancy! to a lass with money!
Of course she told the fool to go,
Where you'd expect, to Jericho.

And then what does he do? 'Twas funny,
But grief so sent him off his head
That in the end he stoops to wed
A gypsy lady-love instead.
And then, before his death, he stamps
His image on a brood of scamps
That went to swell this gang of tramps.
One of these bastard imps, indeed,
The parish has to keep and feed:
A nice memento of his deed!

BRAND.

And that is?—

THE SHERIFF.

Gypsy Gerd, the mad one.

BRAND (*in a low voice*).

Gerd! . . .

THE SHERIFF (*jocosely*).

Eh! The riddle's not a bad one:
You see, his offspring owed its life
To her who was your father's wife:
Because, that offspring's source and root
Was that your mother crossed his suit.

BRAND.

Say is there aught, that you can name,
Might help these poor souls in their shame?

THE SHERIFF.

Pooh! Let the prison doors be slammed.
Why, over head and ears they're damned:
If you could save such sinners, you
Would cheat the devil of his due,
And send the business of damnation
Directly into liquidation.

BRAND.

And yet you had a kindly notion
To build for such a sheltering wall? . . .

THE SHERIFF.

Stop, stop! The mover of that motion
Hastened his motion to recall.

BRAND.

But, Sheriff, what if after all——

THE SHERIFF (*smiling*).

Now *you* adopt another tone
From what you used at first, you'll own.
Let bygones be. Don't look behind;
A man should keep to the same mind.
Good-bye to you; I cannot loiter;
I must be off to reconnoitre,
These lurking runaways to find.
Good-bye, until an early meeting;
To you and yours, a Christmas greeting! [*He goes.*

BRAND (*after a thoughtful silence*).

Atonement here is scarce begun!
So wildly tangled, out and in,
In the strange fabric fate has spun
Sin mingles with the fruit of sin,
Each tainting each, until the sight
That tries to pierce them fancies Right
And bloodiest Wrong are turned to one.
[*Goes to the window and looks out for some time.*
My little child, thy life was spilt,
Poor lamb! to purge my mother's guilt.
From God who sits on high was brought
That message by a soul distraught
Which bade me choose, that fatal day . . .
That soul distraught but lived because
My mother's soul had gone astray.
So from transgression's interplay
God vindicates His awful laws:
So is God's justice visited
On after-generations' head . . .
[*Steps back from the window as in terror.*
The God of Law above us stands;
'Tis stern repayment He demands;

And only full self-sacrifice
Can pay our liberation's price:
But now-a-days the craven herd
Has well-nigh lied away the word.
[*Walks for some time up and down the room.*
To pray! Ah, that's a word that slips
Glibly off everybody's lips:
Hackneyed by people to whose thinking
Prayer means to cry, when skies are black,
For mercy to a far-off Riddle—
Whine for a place on Christ's bowed back,
And stretch both hands to Him, while sinking
In Doubt's soft quagmire to the middle . . .
If that were intercession's plan,
Ha! I could dare, with any man,
A knocking at God's gate to raise—
God's who is " terrible to praise "!
[*Stands thinking in silence.*
And yet . . . in those most dreadful days,
When sorrow was afraid to weep,
When the child slept his latest sleep,
When mother's kiss could not beguile
Back to his fading cheek the smile . . .
What was it, if it was not prayer?
What was that sweet, ecstatic swoon
That music wafted through the air
As of some far-off melody
To which my rapt soul went in tune?
Prayed I? and was I soothed thereby?
Talked I with God? did He regard
My prayer, and had me in His keeping
Here in the darkened house of weeping?
How know I? All is shut and barred—
The gloom rolls back upon my mind—
And light I know not where to find . . .
Yes,—Agnes! Her no gloom makes blind.
[*He cries out in anguish.*
Light, Agnes! If you can, bring light!
[*Agnes opens the door and comes in with the Christmas candles lit. A clear light falls over the room.*

AGNES.

Look, Brand! The Yule lights, clear and bright!

BRAND (*softly*).

The Yule lights! . . .

AGNES (*putting the candles on the table*).

Was I long?

BRAND.

Not long.

AGNES.

How cold you are! You're frozen quite.

BRAND (*with emphasis*).

I am not cold.

AGNES (*smiling*).

So proud, so strong!
You *will* not pine for warmth and light.
[*She makes up the fire.*

BRAND (*walking up and down*).

Ah, Will! . . .

AGNES

(*quietly, to herself, as she puts the room in order*).

Here shall the taper stand . . .
Last year he stretched his tiny hand,—
Caught at the Yule-light's dazzling glare—
My quick, bright, happy little one!
Leaned to it from his little chair,
And asked It it was not a sun?
[*She moves the candlestick a little.*
Ah, now the Christmas candle's beam,
Full on the place—out there—it falls . . .
Now he can see the twinkle plain,
Where he sleeps, through the window-pane;
Can peep in at the glow and gleam
And see our Christmas-covered walls.
The dabbled window seems to weep:
I'll have it smiling, at a word . . .
[*She wipes the window.*

BRAND (*softly, after following her with his eyes*).
When shall this sea of sorrow, stirred
Even to its depths, be lulled to sleep?
For sleep it *must!* . . .

AGNES (*to herself*).
O see, how clear!
As if the lattice glass were not.
The walls to widen out appear,—
The grim cold earth's a cosy cot
Where soundly, sweetly, sleeps my dear! . . .

BRAND.
Hold, Agnes!

AGNES.
Hush!

BRAND (*going nearer*).
What would you there?
Why did you draw the curtain then?

AGNES.
I did but dream. I wake again.

BRAND.
In dreams the snarer sets his snare:
Make fast again!

AGNES (*entreatingly*).
Brand!

BRAND.
Fast and tight!

AGNES.
O, you are hard! it is not right!

BRAND.
Fast, fast!

AGNES (*drawing the shutters to*).
Now all is shut from sight.
Yet God can scarce be wroth I deem
If from the respite of a dream
One draught of solace—

BRAND.

No, forsooth:
He is a judge that blinks the truth,
And views with an indulgent eye
A little mild idolatry!

AGNES (*bursting into tears*).

Is there no end to what He craves?
O, speak! my wing flags tired, I fall—

BRAND.

Once more: 'tis flung to the sea-waves,
The sacrifice that is not All!

AGNES.

But mine was all. I have no more.

BRAND (*shaking his head*).

There is yet something thou must offer.

AGNES (*smiling*).

Ask! mine's the courage of the poor.

BRAND.

Give!

AGNES.

Take! You rob an empty coffer.

BRAND.

Thou hast thy memories and their smart,
Thy sinful flood of yearning pain!

AGNES (*desperately*).

I have the roots of my torn heart!
Pluck out, pluck out those roots!

BRAND.

In vain
Did the gulf's maw thine offering swallow
If thou lamentest what was thrown!

AGNES (*shuddering*).

O, thy Lord's way is hard to follow!

BRAND.
The Will's way is this way alone.

AGNES.
But Mercy's path?

BRAND.
Is built of altars!

AGNES (*with a far-away look, trembling*).
Now yawns like an immense abyss
That text, at which my soul still falters,
But plumbs at last . . .

BRAND.
Which text is this?

AGNES.
Who looks upon Jehovah, dies!

BRAND
(*throwing his arms round her and pressing her tightly to him*).
O hide thee, hide thee! shut thine eyes!
Turn thy face from Him!—

AGNES.
Shall I?

BRAND (*letting her go*).
No!

AGNES.
You suffer, Brand . . .

BRAND.
I love you so!

AGNES.
Hard is your love.

BRAND.
Too hard, indeed?

AGNES.
Ask not. I follow where you lead.

BRAND.

Was it to trifling to devote you,
I dragged you from your dance and game?
For some half-hearted whim I smote you
With the dread message, Naught or All?
Such sacrifice had been a shame
For ends so paltry and so small:
I dub you helpmeet, dare to claim
Your life, you wholly, for the Call!

AGNES.

Aye, claim . . . but leave me not—

BRAND.

I must;
For quiet and for rest I pine;
And now the great church must be planned—

AGNES.

My little church is fallen to dust!

BRAND.

Because it was thine idol-shrine
The storm blew, and it might not stand!
[*Clasping her as in fear.*
Peace be upon thee, and through thee
Be righteous peace on mine and me!
[*Goes towards the side-door.*

AGNES.

Brand, might I softly draw away
The shutter's black, estranging bar—
Only a little, just ajar,—
Brand! might I? O, so softly.

BRAND (*in the doorway*).

Nay!
[*Goes into his own room.*

AGNES.

Locked, all locked, against my crying!
Every outlet from my woe!
Locked and sealed are tears and sighing—
Heaven above, the grave below!
I must out, for air! I languish

In this loneliness of anguish!
Out, but whither? Cold displeasure
Looks upon me from on high;
I must leave my heart's dear treasure
Here behind me, if I fly;
And I know no flight can win me
From the dumb void dread within me.
[*Listens at the door of* BRAND'S *room.*
Loud he reads; too distant is he
For my voice to reach his ear.
Help or solace none is here;
And the Yuletide's God is busy
Listening where the rich come pressing—
Rich in blessing, child-possessing
Folk, with songs of mirth and praise:
'Tis His joyful day of days:
He forgets me: I am only
A poor mother sobbing lonely.
[*Approaching the window stealthily.*
Shall my shutter open—shall it
Let one clear full beam of light
Chase the horrors of the night
From his dark and lonely pallet?
No, to-night he is not there;
Christmas-tide is children's tide;
Hither he has leave to fare—
Stands, perchance, even now outside—
Tip-toe stands, in darkness utter,
Tapping at his mother's shutter . . .
Was not that a child that cried?
Little Alf, I cannot aid—
All is barred—thy father bade—
Alf, I dare not open now! . . .
An obedient child art thou;
Never caused we him annoyance . . .
Fly to heaven, from whence you came!
There is light and there is joyance;
And the child-choirs at their game.
But let no one see you cry!
Do not say that father locked
When you came to him and knocked . . .

Little children wonder why,—
We big elders understand . . .
Say, he gave you tear and sigh;
Say that it was he whose hand
Plucked nice leaves to make the wreath.
Do you see it? There beneath . . .

[*Listens, reflects, and shakes her head.*

Dreams! O, more than one poor shutter
Keeps my babe and me asunder!
Only in the judgment-thunder,
In the glow of that red dawn,
The estranging wall shall totter,
Dungeons burst, and bars be riven,
Groan the gates of hell and heaven,
And the bolts of God be drawn!
Much, O much is here to do
Ere we meet again, we two:
I must work and never falter,
The Demand's deep gulf to fill:
I must steel myself, and will.—
But to-night it is a feast . . .
O, how much one year can alter!—
Hush! it shall be kept at least,
Kept by bringing out that treasure
Whose inestimable worth,—
Now I own nought else on earth,—
But a mother's heart can measure!

[*She kneels at a chest of drawers, opens one, and takes out several things. At the same moment* Brand *opens the door, meaning to speak to her; but when he sees what she is doing, stops and remains standing.* Agnes *does not notice him.*

Brand (*in a low voice*).

Hovering still the grave around!
Playing still on haunted ground!

Agnes.

Here's the veil, the cloak my child
Wore when at the font he smiled.—

In this bundle is the dress—
[*Holds it up, looks at it and laughs.*
Blessings on his prettiness!
O, my little lad looked sweet
There upon the high church-seat!
Here's the scarf, the coat, his wear
The first time he took the air . . .
Much too big he found them all,
But they soon grew much too small . . .
Mittens, bless the little lad!
Stockings,—what a leg he had!
New silk hood, to keep him warm
In the very coldest storm:
That's unworn, as good as new . . .
Here his travelling clothes are, too:
Wrapt in these, with cloak and rug,
He should travel warm and snug.—
The last time I put them by
I was weary, like to die!

BRAND (*clenching his hands in pain*).
Spare me, God! But this I ask:
If her one last idol-shrine
Must be shattered, for the task
Send some other hand than mine!

AGNES.
Here are stains . . . is that from weeping?
O, what wealth is in my keeping!
Pearl-embroidered, tear-bedewed,
Creased with anguish, and imbued,
By the Choice that wrung my soul,
With a sacred aureole—
Hallowed! Yes, the cloak my child
Wore when at the font he smiled,—
Still, for all that was bereft me,
I am rich, while this is left me!
[*A sharp knock is heard at the door.* AGNES *turns with a scream, and at the same moment sees* BRAND. *The door is burst open and a* WOMAN, *raggedly clad, comes in hastily with a child in her arms.*

THE WOMAN
(*sees the baby clothes and shouts to* AGNES).
Share with me, rich mother, share!

AGNES.
You are richer, hundredfold.

THE WOMAN.
Ha! I know your sort of old;
Patter is but empty fare.

BRAND (*approaching her*).
Tell me what you seek.

THE WOMAN.
At least
I don't come to see the Priest!
Liefer with the blast I'd buffet
Than stop here to try my patience
With your preachings and damnations!
Liefer tramp again and rough it,
Drown, lie rotting in the wrack—
Than I'd hear the man in black
Prate about the bonfire-road!
Can I help it, devil take me!
Being what God chose to make me?

BRAND (*in a low voice*).
How her very voice and features
Freeze me, make my heart forbode! . . .

AGNES.
Rest, and warm you, if you need it,
And your baby, we will feed it. . . .

THE WOMAN.
There's no rest for gypsy creatures
Where there's light and warmth! The road,
Our folks have the high-road yonder;
Heath, and fell, and wood to roam;
We must tramp it, we must wander;
Not for us are house and home!

I must soon be off, and dodging
Sheriff, Bailiff, on my trail:
They would like to find me lodging,
The curst bloodhounds! in their jail.

BRAND.

Here they shall not touch you.

THE WOMAN.

Here?
'Twixt four walls and under shelter?
Nay! We found our breath come freer
In the storm and helter-skelter.
Only find the bairn a garment—
Since my eldest one, the varmint!
Sneaked the clout that he was wrapped with,
He's half-naked to the blast—
Look! and frozen blue, and chapped with
The cold drift that scudded past.

BRAND.

Woman, must your child be led,
On the wild, dark path you tread?
Let us raise him, take his hand,
Wash from his young brow the brand—

THE WOMAN.

Ha! 'Tis you should understand,
None can wash that brand away—
Aye, and none shall try, I say!
War with you who fixed the brand!
Know you where I bore him? Listen:
By the ditch-side, on the ground,
Song and cards and drink around,
Sleet and slush the babe to christen;
Crossed with a burnt stick, his throttle
Moistened with a cluck o' the bottle,
While his dam her brat was bearing
There were men stood round her swearing!
Who were they? The baby's father,
Or, by God, his fathers rather.

BRAND.

Agnes!

AGNES.

Yes.

BRAND.

Your call you see.

AGNES (*in horror*).

Brand! to her! It cannot be!

THE WOMAN.

Give me, give me, all you've got—
Cast-off rags or silken stuff—
All's alike from best to worst,
If 'twill wrap him give the lot!
Breath will leave him soon enough;
Let me thaw his body first!

BRAND.

Now the Choice speaks clear and loud.

THE WOMAN.

Thou hast clothes enough for thine;
Canst not spare a rag for mine,
Soon to serve him for a shroud?

BRAND.

Is it not as though her tongue
With a deeper summons rung?

THE WOMAN.

Give me them!

AGNES.

'Tis sacrilege—
Blood-guilt to the little dead!

BRAND.

Must the way he had to tread
Fail us at the threshold's edge? . . .

AGNES (*brokenly*).

Have your will! My heart's last root
I must trample under foot . . .
Woman, come and share with me
Of my superfluity!

THE WOMAN.

Give!

BRAND.

Share Agnes? Only share?

AGNES (*with passionate force*).

Rather death itself I'd dare
Than lose all—see inch by inch
I have yielded, did not flinch . . .
Now I pause,—I can no more!
Half must serve . . . 'tis all she sought . .

BRAND.

Was the whole too much, before,
When for thine own child 'twas bought?

AGNES (*giving to the* WOMAN).

Take the cloak in which he went
To the Christening sacrament,—
Frock, and scarf, and cap to wear
To keep off the chill night air;
Silken hood, to keep him warm
In the very coldest storm . . .
Take them! Be no rag let fall!

THE WOMAN.

Give them!

BRAND.

Agnes, giv'st thou *all?*

AGNES (*giving*).

Even the Christening cloak he went
Clothed in to the sacrament! . . .

THE WOMAN.

So I've swept you clean and clear . . .
Time that I were far from here!
I'll just wrap him up, and trundle
Off, full pelt, with the whole bundle.

AGNES

(*stands in a violent inward struggle; at last asks*)

Tell me, Brand! Can justice ask,
More, yet more, a further task?

BRAND.

Did you with a willing heart
Face the gift, nor grudge the smart?

AGNES.

No!

BRAND.

'Twas thrown to winds and waves!
The Demand still speaks, and craves.
[*Turns to go.*

AGNES

(*is silent till he is nearly at the door; then she cries out*)

Brand!

BRAND.

What would you?

AGNES.

I have lied!
I repent! I will be brave!
Ah, you dreamed not I could save
Something, something still beside . . .

BRAND.

What?

AGNES (*taking a folded baby's cap from her bosom*).

One relic I have yet——

BRAND.

'Tis the cap——

AGNES.

Yes, weeping-wet,
Clammy from his deathly sweat,—
Worn, since then, upon my heart!

BRAND.

Serve thine idols! I depart. [*Turns to go.*

AGNES.

Stop!

BRAND.

What would you?

AGNES.

Nay, you see!
[*Reaches him the cap.*

BRAND (*goes to her, and asks, without taking it*)
Willingly?

AGNES.

Yes, willingly!

BRAND.

She is waiting; give it me. [*Goes out.*

AGNES.

Robbed and rifled, even the last
Tie that bound me to the past!
[*She stands motionless a moment; then the expression of her face changes little by little to one of radiant happiness.* BRAND *comes back: she flies to him jubilantly, throws herself on his neck, and cries.*
I am free, Brand, free at last!

BRAND.

Agnes!

AGNES.

Night is overpast!
All the horrors that have pressed
Like a nightmare on my breast,
I have flung them far away.
Will, yes, Will has won the day!
All the blinding mists have lifted,
All the drooping clouds have drifted;
Far, past Night and Death withdrawn,
Shows a glimmer of the Dawn!
" Burial-ground," aye, " Burial-ground! "
Now tears flow not at the sound:
See the wound is healed, and even
At that word forbears to bleed:
For our child is safe in heaven!

BRAND.

Thou hast conquered now indeed!

AGNES.

I have conquered all the gloom
And the terror of the tomb!
O, look upward: there he stands,
Alf, our own Alf, bright and glad,—
Stretches out his little hands!
If a thousand mouths I had,
If I could, I would not choose,
Would not dare, one mouth to use
To demand him back again!
Richly doth our God ordain
To make ministry of pain;
For this child I loved and lost,
This my sacrificial Host,
Was the saving of my soul.
He was lent, he was not given,—
Lent to lead me to the goal! . . .
Thanks, that thou hast guided me,
Faithfully for me hast striven . . .
O, I saw thine agony! . . .
Now 'tis thou that hear'st the voice
In the Valley of the Choice:
Now on thee the brunt must fall
Of the Choice's " Naught or All! "

BRAND.

Agnes, nay! The strife is o'er;
Past the pangs; secure the prize!

AGNES.

Dost forget that text of yore:
He who sees Jehovah, dies? . . .

BRAND (*shrinking back*).

Ah, a new and dreadful light!
No, a thousand times, ah, no!
I have strong hands for the fight
And I will not let thee go!
All on earth besides may slip—
Every grain escape my grip—
O but never, never thou!

AGNES.

Choose, you stand at the parting ways,
And the choice is on you now!
Quench my newly kindled blaze,—
Stop my inspiration's springs,—
Give me back my idol-things:
(Still outside the woman stays):
Thrust me back to the beginning,
To the heaven-forgetting days,
When I, sunken in the mire,
Sinned nor knew that I was sinning:
Seal my soul, and clip my wings:
Fashion me to your desire,—
I am clay in your strong hands!
Bind with serfdom's iron bands,
Clog me, drag me down again
Thither, whence your own self brought me,
To the life that you untaught me—
Life of darkness and of pain!
If all this you dare, and will,—
Lo! I am your helpmeet still . . .
Choose! You stand at the parting ways!

BRAND.

Then were I indeed undone!
No, but far from this sad place,
Far from memories of your sorrow
You shall wake to find, some morrow,
Life and light indeed are one!

AGNES.

What! forget that God has bound you
Here by baptism of the Call,—
By the thousand souls that found you
Helper, healer, here around you,
Whom the Lord God bids you raise
To redemption from their fall?
Choose! You stand at the parting ways!

BRAND.

Nay, I have no choice to make!

AGNES (*throwing herself on his neck*).

Thanks, for this, for every sake!
Faithfully hast thou befriended
And my faltering footsteps led:
Now there close around my head
Mists of weariness, my bed
Shall by thee be watched and tended.

BRAND.

Sleep! Thy long day's work is ended.

AGNES.

And my lamp lit for the night.
All my strength is spent with fight,
I am weary and oppressed! . . .
O but praising God is light! . . .
Good-night, Brand!

BRAND.

Good-night!

AGNES.

Good-night!
Thanks for all! And now to rest. [*She goes.*

BRAND (*clenching his hand against his breast*).

Soul, be steadfast to the last!
Till the fight of fights is o'er!
When thine *All* away is cast,
Loss is gain—for evermore!

FIFTH ACT

A year and a half later. The new church completed and decorated for the consecration. The river runs close by. Early morning with mist. The PARISH CLERK *is busy hanging wreaths up outside the church. Presently the* SCHOOLMASTER *joins him.*

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What! on the spot?

THE CLERK.

'Twas time I came!
Just lend a hand these wreaths to throw
From post to post, 'dye see? to show
The great procession where to go.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Up at the manse a sort of frame
Is raising, finished with a round . . .

THE CLERK.

Aye, to be sure.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What's that to be?

THE CLERK.

In honour of the priest, you see;
'Twill bear his name on a gilt ground.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Yes, there's a fine to-do to-day,
And all the valley's in a taking;
The fiord with sails is nearly white.

THE CLERK.

Yes; now the people are awaking.
In our last parson's time, God rest him!
There was no talk of strife and fight;
One slept, with no one to molest him.—
I scarcely know which way is right.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Why, life, Clerk! life!

THE CLERK.

But you and I
Unmoved let all this life go by:
What does that come of?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Why, we kept
At work until the others slept;
And when they waked, and left no use
For us, then *we* began to snooze!

THE CLERK.

But yet you said that life was best?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

So says the Dean, and Parson too,
And I myself endorse their view,
Provided that the truth expressed
Concerns the mass of folk,—the rest.
We have another law, of course,
From what's for hill-side folk in force.
We head the district; we're official;
And movements may be prejudicial.
We have to keep a tightish rein,
Church views and discipline maintain,
Discourage broils by all our actions,
And, in a word, keep clear of factions.

THE CLERK.

Yet, here's our parson in the thick of it?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

That's just what's so improper of him!
I know that some of those above him
Don't like his work,—in fact they're sick of it,
And, only that the people love him,
They would have shown him the cold shoulder
Before he was a great deal older.

But he is shrewd: he smells a rat:
He knows a trick worth two of that.
He builds! 'Twill carry all things through
Here, if there is but " something doing "!
It may be only mischief brewing—
That no one asks: the thing's to *do !*
We all, from leader to tom-noddy,
Must still *do* something,—or somebody!

THE CLERK.

You've been to parliament, and so
Our folk and country you must know.
But one who travelled through the place
Soon after our awakening
Said, we were once a sleepy race,
But now—we'd grown quite promising.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Yes, we are promising, I know:
To promise now is all the go!
And each can now interpret from his
Own head the meaning of his promise.

THE CLERK.

There's just one point I'm never clear of:
See here,—you've studied! please explain!
What *is* this promise, in the main,—
This People's Promise that I hear of?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

A People's Promise? Really, Clerk,
I can't go into that at length.
But it is something, I may state,
People run after on the strength
Of an idea: it's something great
That's destined to eventuate . . .
But in the good time coming, mark!

THE CLERK.

Thanks: I'm no longer in the dark.
But this suggests one point, again,
I'd like you briefly to explain.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Speak freely.

THE CLERK.

Tell me at what date
Will this good time that's coming come?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Never!

THE CLERK.

What, never?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Can you doubt it?
For, when it comes, it has become
Present—no future then about it!

THE CLERK.

Yes, I can see no flaw in that;
There's no denying it, that's flat.
But when, then, shall a promise hold?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

A promise, I've already told,
Deals only with the future; then
It holds in future.

THE CLERK.

Yes, but *when*—
Just tell me will this future come?

THE SCHOOLMASTER (*aside*).

Well, "clerks are fools!"
(*Aloud*) I told you last,—
And surely it's a simple sum,—
The future simply cannot come
Because, when it arrives, it's *past!*

THE CLERK.

Ah, thanks . . .

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

In all ideas, we find
There's something like a trick behind;
Which is still clear enough, I take it,
At least to folk who look alive
And count a little more than five.
To make a promise *means* to break it!
You can't both *give* and *keep* your word;
To censure that would be absurd.
Word-keeping always was called hard;
But now 'tis proved, with just a smatter
Of logic, absolutely barred.—
Well, let's discuss some other matter.
Just tell me——

THE CLERK.

Hist!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What's that you're saying?

THE CLERK.

Hush!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

I declare, there's some one playing
Upon the organ!

THE CLERK.

Aye, that's he.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

The priest?

THE CLERK.

You've hit it.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Only hark!
He must have risen with the lark.

THE CLERK.

I have my doubts of that. Maybe
He never was abed last night.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

You think so?

THE CLERK.

Aye, he's not quite right:
He's felt a lonely, gnawing tooth
Since he became a widower.
He keeps his sorrow dark, that's truth;
But still it breaks out here and there.
It's like as if the heart of him
Were full and spilling at the brim;
And then he plays. . . . Each note's as wild
As if he wept for wife and child.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

It's like them talking, so to say—

THE CLERK.

As if one grieved and one consoled—

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

If duty did not keep us cold?—

THE CLERK.

If we were not official—eh?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

And were not hide-bound by conditions,
And by respect for our positions!

THE CLERK.

If we could throw 'em off for ever
And cry, to hell with book and pen!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

If we might leave off being clever,
And dare to feel like other men!

THE CLERK.

Friend, no one looks—let's feel for once!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What! condescend like any dunce
Of common, everyday humanity?
According to our priest, it's vanity
To try to be two things at once;
With the best will, no creature can
Be both official and a man!
We ought to be, in small and great,
Our worthy Sheriff's duplicate.

THE CLERK.

Why his?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Well every one remembers
The fire that laid his place in embers,—
Only the archives—they were saved!

THE CLERK.

Yes, I remember; 'twas one night—

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

One stormy evening; yes, you're right.
And how the Sheriff toiled and slaved,
As if he had a trebled life!
Old Nick stood by; folk heard his laughter;
And seeing him, the Sheriff's wife
Shrieks, Husband dear! The devil's after
Your soul! Seek safety, in God's name!
Then shouts the Sheriff through the flame:
My soul? Deuce take it! Stir about,
And help to get the archives out! . . .
You see, he's Sheriff out and in,
Right from the centre to the skin;
And so I'm sure that he'll attain
A place of payment for his pain!

THE CLERK.

What's that?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

You're answered in a trice,
In the Good Sheriff's Paradise.

THE CLERK.

My learned friend——

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Well!

THE CLERK.

I make bold
To hear in every word you say
Hints of the ferment of the day.
For no one who observes how few
Show reverence now for what is old
Can have a doubt that there *is* ferment—

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

The rotten nourishes the new;
The mouldy can but go to mould.
Our generation's in consumption
And if it hasn't got the gumption
To cough it up—next comes interment.
Ferment there is, I can't deny;
One sees it with the naked eye.
The day that saw the old church fall
Seemed to take with it almost all
In which our life till then had found
Its firmest root and growing-ground.

THE CLERK.

There came a stillness on the crowd:
For pulling down they'd all been loud;
But then somehow the cry was deadened,
And there was many a one that reddened,
And looked askance, and stood in thought,
When the old parish church was brought
In earnest to the point of rubble:
Some held it was inviolable.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

The crowd all thought that to the past
A thousand ties still bound them fast
Till the new church for which they waited
Was fairly, fully consecrated.
So they kept anxiously awake
To see what turn the thing would take,—
Looked, all agog, to this great day,
When the old flag is put away
And the new colours freely fly.
Yet they grew pale and mum, as higher
And higher still up rose the spire,—
And now,—why now the time's gone by.

THE CLERK (*pointing out to the side*).

Just see the crowd! Both great and small
Come thronging here——

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

In thousands.—Well!
How still they are!

THE CLERK.

Yet, there's a swell,
As the sea swells before a squall.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

That is the people's heart that's beating,—
And groaning underneath the weight
Of feeling that the time is great.
They look as if the road they trod
Led to some great election meeting—
The election of another God!
Hi! Where's the priest? I scarce can breathe
I'd like to hide myself from sight!

THE CLERK.

And so would I!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

At such a turn
One scarce can sound one's self aright:
Each depth has deeper ones beneath;
We will and won't; we shrink and yearn!

THE CLERK.

Friend!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Well!

THE CLERK.

Ahem!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What are you at?

THE CLERK.

I do believe that we've been *feeling!*

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Feeling? Not I.

THE CLERK.

Nor I, that's flat!
One witness can't convict of stealing.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

We two are men, not silly lasses.
Good-morning! I must join my classes. [*Goes.*

THE CLERK.

I swear I've almost seen a vision,
And held myself up to derision!
Now I'm myself again, I'm steadied!
Shut like a clasp-book; shrewd, clear-headed.
I'll bustle off: here all looks level,
And idleness is of the devil.

[*Goes off the other side.*

[*The organ, which has been resounding faintly suddenly peals out loud, and ends in a piercing discord. Presently* BRAND *comes out.*

BRAND.

No! I cannot make it speak,
Not one clear, full note can force:
Dies the music in a shriek!
Roof and arches, walls and groining,
Seem to close together, joining
In one wooden, unresounding
Clasp, the stifling notes surrounding,
Like the coffin round the corse!
I have tried, played on and on;
But the organ's voice is gone.
Then in prayer I raised my own;
But each word as it was spoken
Was flung back upon me, broken,
In a hollow, muffled moan
Like a cracked bell's rusty tone. . . .
'Twas as if God stood and heard,
'Throned above me in the choir:
Waved me back from Him, in ire,
Would not listen to my word!—
I would build God's temple great:
So I trusted, so I sware:
I with a light heart could dare,
Raze, pull down, and extirpate:
Lo, the finished work stands there.—
All the people vow in chorus,—
Cry, What greatness stands before us! . . .
Is it they, who judge aright?
Or have I the clearer sight?
Is this House the House I willed?
Is the doubt which made me build
In the newer precinct stilled? . . .
Faintly whispering yet I hear it!
What, is this the mighty Fane
Which had loomed upon my spirit,
Domed above a world of pain?

[*Noticing the preparations for the ceremony.*

Waving flags and garlands clinging;
Scholars practising their singing;
All bedecked, from ground to steeple;
Parsonage filled full with people;—

All will see me, all will know me;
They have raised my name in gold! . . .
Give me light, O Lord, or throw me
Deep beneath the graveyard mould!
There's an hour to wait at least:
All are thinking of the priest,
His the name on every lip:
O, I know their thoughts,—and knowing
Burn for every word that's said!
Praise, in icy currents flowing,
Sweeps like magic through my head. . . .
O, to cast oblivion round me,
In some wild beast's cave to slip,
Hide my face where none had found me!

THE SHERIFF

(*comes up in full uniform and greets him, beaming with pleasure*).

Well, now the working week is past
And we've our Sabbath day at last!
Now we can reef our sails and hoist
Our Sunday flag; past hill and wood
Float with the stream, and feel rejoiced
That everything is very good!
Accept my best congratulations,
My most illustrious friend, whose name
Throughout the land will soon have fame;
Accept my warm felicitations.
I own I feel affected, quite;
And yet I'm brimming with delight!
And how do *you* feel?

BRAND.

Almost choking.

THE SHERIFF.

No more of that! You must be joking.
You've got to preach, to preach like thunder,
Give them good measure, running over!
There's such an echo, you'll discover,
That all I've met are full of wonder.

BRAND.

Indeed?

THE SHERIFF.

Why, yes; and even the Dean
Is highly pleased with all he's seen.
Then, what a noble style to view!
And what a grandeur, what a weight,
In all the forms——

BRAND.

You see that too?

THE SHERIFF.

See what?

BRAND.

That look of being great!

THE SHERIFF.

It's not mere *look*,—it *is* so, Brand!
Whether far off or near you stand.

BRAND.

It really is? You do not doubt it?

THE SHERIFF.

Zounds, man! there's not a doubt about it,—
Too great for us! The South might scout it:
There, there are countries which afford
Larger criterions of size;
But here with us, pent in, and placed
Among bare mounds upon a waste
With just a strip 'twixt fell and fiord,——
We can but view it with surprise.

BRAND.

It may be what you say is true.—
We've changed an old lie for a new.

THE SHERIFF.

What next?

BRAND.

We've turned the thoughts of people
From the old landmark's sheltering mould
To a new-style cloud-scaling steeple.
The chorus used to sound, How old!
Now the cry runs, How great, how grand!
There's not its like in all the land!

THE SHERIFF.

My friend I still must characterise
The man who calls for larger size
As pretty brazen,—so *I* feel it.

BRAND.

But this shall be made clear to all:
The church, as now it stands, is small,
It would be lying to conceal it.

THE SHERIFF.

Look here! have done with foolish musing!
Where is the reason in abusing
What you yourself took pains to build?
With satisfaction all are filled;
They fancy everything so grand
As never yet was seen or planned;
Let them continue so to fancy!
Why make each poor unhappy man see
A light he never wanted lit?
Why poke and prod them up to it?
It's all a question of believing.
The church might be a rabbit hutch—
It really would not matter much
Provided folk securely dream
That it is great in the extreme.

BRAND.

In all, one doctrine of deceiving.

THE SHERIFF.

Besides, it's festival to-day;
They're all our guests, as you may say;

And it's poor taste towards a guest
To fail in putting forth your best.
But most of all for your own sake
It would be an extreme mistake
With the rude hand of truth to press
This painful boil of littleness.

BRAND.

How so?

THE SHERIFF.

No further to deceive you
Our Councillors are going to give you
A silver presentation beaker:
And the inscription will seem wrong
If you depreciate the church.
Then the expressly written song
And speech—I am myself the speaker—
Will both appear absurdly strong
If you thus leave us in the lurch.
And so, you see, you *must* give way
And keep a clear, cool head to-day.

BRAND.

I see—what often wounds my eyes—
A lying feast the price of lies!

THE SHERIFF.

The Lord preserve us! My good friend,
To what can such strong language tend?
But now—to drop the point of taste—
There's something else that must be told:
If that was silver, this is gold:
For know, you have been highly graced
And smiled on from a Royal height:
In short, you are to be a Knight!
This day, a decorated man,
You'll flaunt the Cross upon your breast. . . .

BRAND.

On me a heavier cross has pressed!
Take that from me, whoever can!

THE SHERIFF.

What! Quite unmoved you hear me mention
This striking mark of condescension?
You altogether are a riddle!—
But recollect—we're in the middle—

BRAND (*stamping his foot*).

'Tis idle chatter, all you say;
We part no wiser than we met.
Of what behind my words there lay
You have not caught one glimmer yet.
The greatness that I spoke about
Was not what inches measure out;
But that which, veiled, yet glows with light,
Which chills, yet fires the soul; which seems
To beckon on to lingering dreams;
Which lifts us, like a starry night;
Which—Leave me: I am faint, depressed;
Discuss, talk, argue with the rest!
[*Goes up towards the church.*

THE SHERIFF (*to himself*).

Who, in such senseless jargon gleaning,
Could find the vestige of a meaning?
Greatness which seems to glow . . . and beckon . . .
And which one can't in inches reckon . . .
And then, a starry night? . . . I think
The parson's had an early drink! [*Goes.*

BRAND (*comes back over the open ground*).

Never was loneliness so bitter
On the wild mountain heights, as here!
Here not an answer rings back clear,
But all is cackle, croak, and twitter. . . .
[*Looks away after the* SHERIFF.
O, I could crush him with my heel!
Whene'er to lift his gaze I seek
Above mere trickery and lies,
He spits—incontinent to speak—
His foul soul out before my eyes.—
O, Agnes! Why were you too weak?
Tired with this hollow play, I reel:

None yields, none conquers: yes, I own,
He hopeless fights who fights alone.

THE DEAN (*comes up*).

Beloved children! O my sheep—
Excuse me, Colleague, I should say . . .
This ceremonial scene misled . . .
My sermon's running in my head . . .
My mouth the taste seems still to keep
Though I prepared it yesterday.—
Enough of that.—My thanks to you,
Who broke the ice, in spite of all,
Pulled down what was at point to fall,
And built it worthy, great and new!

BRAND.

Not worthy.

THE DEAN.

What's that observation?
What's wanting now but consecration?

BRAND.

Could but the new-built house impart
Clean spirit and regenerate heart!

THE DEAN.

Those follow in the natural course.
That finely panelled roof, that great
Well-lighted space, will make perforce
The people look regenerate.
That echo, too, which when the priest
Is preaching, doubles every breath,
Will make his congregation's faith
Increase by cent. by cent. at least!
There's many a much larger land
On an unprejudiced review
Might fail to show results more grand;
And all of this we owe to you.
Allow a colleague to express
His heart-felt thanks: which thanks, I guess,

The festive board will reinforce,
'Mid toasts, and all the proper scenery,
With many an eloquent discourse.
From the young lions of the deanery.—
But, my dear Brand, you look so pale! . . .

BRAND.

Long since my heart began to fail.

THE DEAN.

Of course,—so much to superintend
And none to give support and stay.—
But now the worst is at an end;
All promises a glorious day.
From parishes quite far away
The people in their thousands flow.
Now don't be down: be sure 'twill go!
Consider: who can match your gift
Of oratory at a shift?
Your reverend colleagues, not a few,
Are meeting you with open arms:
Abounding gratitude to you
The whole assembly's bosom warms,
And then the work—how that's progressed!
And all the lovely decoration!
And the day's text—how highly blest!
And then . . . The sumptuous collation!
I just was in your house, dear priest,
As they were cutting up the veal.
That must have been a splendid beast!
It took some trouble, I'll be bound,
Before so fine a piece was found,
In these hard times, which we all feel,
With meat at thirteen pence the pound.
But let that pass—until our feast
I have an errand here.

BRAND.

Don't spare me!
Speak on, and stab, and rend, and tear me!

THE DEAN.

My method's of a milder sort.
But to be brief—since time is short—

There's just one little point that you
Must now give more attention to:
It won't be difficult.—O yes,
I've not a doubt that you can guess
The point to which my words refer . . .
'Tis your official duty, sir.
Till now you sometimes laid, confess!
On Use and Wont too little stress;
And Use and Wont, if not the first
Of things, are by no means the worst!
Lord love you, *I* don't want to scold:
You're inexperienced, far from old,
And, fresh from town to country places,
It takes some time to learn one's paces.
But, *now*, my friend, it will be meet
To be a little more discreet.
You've looked too much in what you teach,
To individual needs of each;
That was a grave mistake you made.
No; let them in the lump be weighed.
Let all with the one brush be tarred.
Trust me, you'll win the more regard.

BRAND.

Please make yourself more understood.

THE DEAN.

You've built a church for public good.
That church should clothe, as outward dress,
The spirit of peace and lawfulness.
What is Religion to the State?
A force which serves to elevate;
A strength on which it can rely,
A guardian of morality.
Of means the State has sometimes dearth;
It wants to get its money's worth.
" Good Christian " spells " good citizen."
Think you it ladles out its pence
Just to do good to God and men—
Itself get only trouble thence?
No, sir; the State is not so mad;
And all our prospects would be bad

Did not the State unswervingly
Keep this life only in its eye.
But, then, its goal it can but reach
Through its official—in this case
Its priests—the men who teach and preach.

BRAND.

Speak on! each word a sage would grace.

THE DEAN.

There's little more. You've now erected
This church to benefit the State;
To its support, then, from this date,
Your work must ever be directed.
Our service in an hour's time,
Will be pervaded by this spirit;
I hear it in the belfry's chime,
And in the deed of gift I hear it.
There goes a promise with the gift,
Whose purport you should fully sift—

BRAND.

By heaven, I never meant it so!

THE DEAN.

O, well! it's too late now, you know—

BRAND.

Ha! We'll soon see if that's the case!

THE DEAN.

Excuse my smiling in your face. . . .
What *is* there here to make you mad?
You're going to promise nothing bad!
You still can serve each single soul,
And the State, too, upon the whole.
If you'll behave like other pastors
You'll hit the need of both your masters.
'Tis not to save Dick, Tom, and Harry
From hell-fire that you hold your orders,
But the full flow of Grace to carry
At large throughout the parish borders.

Though, saved in gross, 'tis easy shown,
Each retail soul comes by its own.
Being just *half*-republican,
(Perhaps you're not aware) our polity
Puts Liberty beneath her ban,
But fairly dotes upon Equality.
Now this we can't attain until
We've levelled down each little hill.
But that is what you *don't* do, Brand!
You've heightened, on the other hand,
Each small projection, more and more,—
Perhaps invisible before.
Each Churchman's now a personality
Not just a part of one totality;
And that's no service to the State.
Nay, this is why we get so late
Collecting tithes, and have to wait,
For other blessings of society;
The Church's hat—there's such variety—
No longer fits for every pate.

BRAND.

O, what a vista opens now!

THE DEAN.

But don't be down, for *that* won't serve us;
Though this confusion, I'll allow,
Is quite enough to make one nervous.
But while there's life, there's hope at least;
Your gift has sanctioned and increased
Your duty to adopt the plastic
State view of things ecclesiastic.
In everything there is a rule:
Mere powers, if out of bounds you trust 'em,
Just like a wild, unbroken colt,
Away o'er hedge and ditch will bolt,
Past all the boundary-marks of custom.
Order knows still one law throughout.
It's differently named, no doubt;
They call it in the fine arts, School;
End in the art of war, if I'm
Correct, it's keeping step, or time.

Yes, that's the thing for us, my friend,
To this it is the State must tend.
It cannot at the double go,
And marking time—why, that's too slow.
One step, for every foot the same,
Is the State system's end and aim.

BRAND.

The gutter for the eagle's use,
The dizzy cloud-wrack for the goose!

THE DEAN.

Man, thank the Lord, is not a beast;
If we use parables, at least
Let's have recourse to holy writ:
There's not a subject *that* won't fit.
From Genesis to Revelation
It teems with apologue and fable.
I will but point on this occasion
To that projected Tower of Babel.
How far did those good folk attain?
The reason's easy to explain:
It is that diverse tongues they spoke:
It is that they must needs cabal: it is
That they pulled crossways at the yoke:
In short, developed personalities.—
I see two kernels: this is but
One half the fable's double nut:
That no man can be safe alone;
The isolated soon is thrown.
The man whom God will have to fall
He first makes individual.
Among the Romans it was said
That the gods sent him off his head:
But a minority of one
Is mad, when all is said and done,
And surely cannot but await,
As latter end, the same sad fate
Of which Uriah bore the brunt
When David sent him to the front.

BRAND.

Perhaps; but wherefore waste your breath?
I see no tragedy in death.
And are you quite so sure, my friend,
That those same builders, in the end,
With all one mind and all one speech,
Would really ever have been able
To raise to heaven their Tower of Babel?

THE DEAN.

To heaven? No, that's what none can do,
Completely up to heaven to reach!—
And that is kernel number two
Held in the nutshell of our fable:
He builds to fall, who builds too high,
And seeks to emulate the sky.

BRAND.

Yet Jacob's ladder reached to heaven,
And heavenward still man's soul has striven.

THE DEAN.

Of course—in *that* way! Thank the Lord,
No room for disagreement there!
Heaven's the natural reward
Of well-spent life, and faith, and prayer.
Life's one thing; faith's a different notion;
Both spoil when you begin to mix.
Our working days you know, are six;
We save the seventh for emotion.
If you keep open church from Monday
Till Saturday, what use for Sunday?
The word will lose its cleansing force
Unless dispensed with moderation;
Like art, religion has recourse
To some judicious concentration.
On the Ideal fix your eye
When safe upon the pulpit's perch;
But lay it with your surplice by,
As soon as you come out of church.—
Some general law, then, must be heeded:
The lines it draws may not be broken.

I saw some clearing up was needed
Upon this point, and so have spoken.

BRAND.

If I'm to keep my soul's religion whole,
It won't go into your State pigeon-hole.

THE DEAN.

You'll find one soon to fit yourself,
My friend! but on a higher shelf:
You must go up——

BRAND.

Does going higher
Mean stooping downward in the mire?

THE DEAN.

"Who humbleth him, shall be exalted."
The hook, to catch, must needs be bent.

BRAND.

The man, to serve, shall die the death!

THE DEAN.

Now to what inference have you vaulted?
Who talked of dying?

BRAND.

It was meant!
One must be pallid, lifeless, spent,
A skeleton sans blood and breath,
If for your death-in-life he'd do!

THE DEAN.

God knows, I would not bleed a cat—
Much less phlebotomize on you!
I would but leave the gate ajar
Upon a road I've travelled far
Myself: no harm I hope in that.

BRAND.

And know you whither leads that gate?
That at the cock-crow of the State
I the ideal should betray
For which I lived until this day!

THE DEAN.

Betray? Such terms there's no excuse for.
I said if my advice you'd follow,
Some few conceptions you would swallow,
Which we—the State—can find no use for.
You still may keep each cherished feeling
By first hermetically sealing:
Indulge each flight, each aspiration—
But not before your congregation!
Trust me, you've little to expect
But trouble, if you're so stiff-necked.

BRAND.

Yes, dread of trouble, hope of gain,
Are on thy brow the brand of Cain:
Cry that thou hast, with worldly art
Slain the pure Abel of thy heart!

THE DEAN (*aside*).

He positively calls me "thou"!
This is too much:
(*aloud*) I will not now
Prolong discussion, but again
Will beg you just to understand
That you must know (or work in vain)
The time you live in and the land;
For victory will never find you
Unless you've got the times behind you.
Our artists, bards—dare they affront
The prejudices of their neighbour?
Our warriors, too: with us a sabre
Is something innocently blunt.
And why? Because the maxim pleads:—
Consider what your country needs!
Let each man's fad be in his fob;
Instead of a projecting knob,
Let him lie level with the mob.
The time's humane, the Sheriff says;
If you'd adopt humaner ways
You might do something of the best.
But off your corners must be knocked,

Each tetchy little twig be docked!
You must be smooth, and like the rest,
Not on one single hobby bent:
Thus may your work be permanent.

BRAND.

Far, far, from here!

THE DEAN.

Of course, of course!
A man like you must rise perforce,
In time, into a higher sphere.
But you'll discover, there as here,
That you must don, if you would please,
The uniform the time decrees.
It needs a sergeant, hand on stick,
Time into common heads to lick;
And for our leaders now, a real
Drill-sergeant is the best ideal.
And as the sergeant by the squad
Marshals his men to worship God,
Just so the priest should marshal his
To paradise by parishes.
It's all so easy! As a ground
For faith, authority is found;
In which on due instruction based,
Implicit confidence is placed.
Then as to ways of carrying out
Our faith, the rubrics leave no doubt;
So, brother, *don't* be down,—but use
The time to get some clearer views.
Investigate the situation,
And pray avoid all perturbation!
In church to-day perhaps my tone
A little higher might be thrown,—
But being new to your acoustics
I shouldn't wonder if it now sticks.
Farewell, farewell! I am to preach
On human nature's fatal breach
(Between the spirit and the flesh meant)
And the defacing of God's image.—

But now I'll take some light refreshment
And so avoid the general scrimmage. [*Goes.*

BRAND

(*stands a moment in thought as though turned to stone*).

All have I sacrificed—my all,
For what I fondly deemed God's call!
But now, His trumpet boldly blown,
What spirit I have served is shown!
Not yet! not theirs, for all they think!
This churchyard has had blood to drink;
My light, my life, lie here below,—
My soul I will not yet forego!
'Tis horrible to stand alone,
Where'er I look, to see the dead,
And to be flouted with a stone
When I am famishing for bread!
What truth, what dreadful truth he spoke!
Yet how the ground beneath it broke!
The dove of God's enlightenment
Sits veiled; it ne'er has hovered o'er me.—
O that *one* soul now stood before me
Whose faith some calm assurance lent!

[EINAR, *pale and emaciated, dressed in black, comes past along the road and stops on seeing* BRAND.

BRAND (*calling out*).

You, Einar?

EINAR.

By that name I'm known.

BRAND.

I was just sighing for one face,
One bosom, not of wood or stone!
Come to me! Come to my embrace!

EINAR.

It is not meet, for I am saved.

BRAND.

Ah! for what passed you bear a grudge
When last we met?

EINAR.

No, you behaved
But as you had to. You, I judge,
Were the blind instrument of God
Sent when the world's wild way I trod.

BRAND (*drawing back*).

What is this language?

EINAR.

'Tis the blest
Language of one who, slumbering late
In sin, awoke regenerate.

BRAND.

Strange! you had made, I heard folk say,
A start on quite a different way——

EINAR.

Yes, pride had led me far astray,
And trust in my own strength had shamed me.
Those gifts the godless world deems best—
The gifts they said that I possessed—
Of hand and voice, were only snares,
And Satan caught me unawares,
But God be praised, who still did keep
An eye upon His erring sheep,
And in His own good time reclaimed me.

BRAND.

How?

EINAR.

Why, I fell.

BRAND.

I do not think
I understand.

EINAR.

'Twas cards and drink:
He gave me a great taste for gaming——

BRAND.

Is *that* God's method of reclaiming?

EINAR.

Salvation came by steps and stealth;
For next He took away my health.
My talent and my spirits went,
And I to hospital was sent;
Lay as a soul in hell-fire lies—
Wherever I might cast my eyes
I saw a million great black flies!
Then out I came, and got acquainted
With three good sisters, saved and sainted,
Who, helped by a divine, so spoke,
That off I shuffled this world's yoke,
Escaped the net of sin, and trod
God's earth a perfect child of God

BRAND.

Indeed.

EINAR.

What different ways we're led!
Now hill, now dale,—'tis strange to think.

BRAND.

But since?—

EINAR.

Since then? That's quickly said:
I took to preaching against drink.
But that vocation is as yet
With strong temptations too beset;
So, now, compelled my sphere to vary,
I'm off to be a missionary.

BRAND.

Where?

EINAR.

In Anthropoid-negroland.—
But now we must be parting, Brand;
My time is precious—

BRAND.

Won t you stay?
You see it's festival—

EINAR.

Nay, nay,
Mid dusky souls I see my task. [*Is going.*

BRAND.

No memory plucks you back to ask?—

EINAR.

Of what?

BRAND.

Of one to whom the change
'Twixt then and now were sad and strange?

EINAR.

Ah, now I see! You must refer
To that young woman who had caught me
In fleshly snares, ere faith had taught me
And cleansed me for the purer life.—
Pray tell me, how is it with her?

BRAND.

The next year she became my wife.

EINAR.

That does not signify. I turn not
My thoughts on matters which concern not
The one great fact I have in view.

BRAND.

Our wedded life was blest with joy
And rich in grief . . . We lost our boy—

EINAR.

That does not signify.

BRAND.

'Tis true
He was more lent than given,—and then
One day we look to meet again.
But then his mother went . . . The green
Of both graves from here is seen.

EINAR.

That does not signify—

BRAND.

That too?

EINAR.

From all such things I turn aside:
What I would know is, *how* she died.

BRAND.

With hope to see a glorious dawn,
Her heart's rich treasure all undrawn,
Will steadfast even unto death,—
With thanks for everything life gave
And took,—so went she to her grave!

EINAR.

What vain delusions! At all cost,
Tell me the outlook of her faith!

BRAND.

Unshaken.

EINAR.

But in whom?

BRAND.

In God!

EINAR.

In Him alone? Ah, then she's lost.

BRAND.

What's that you say?

EINAR.

Damned, more's the pity.

BRAND (*quietly*).

Go, wretch!

EINAR.

What's more it will be odd
If he who is the lord of hell
Doesn't get hold of you as well;
You, too, are of Destruction's City!

BRAND.

Dare *you* pass judgment of hell-fire,
You that late wallowed in the mire?

EINAR.

On me there does not now remain,
Washed in the bath of Faith, one stain;
In Holiness, as in a tub,
Each spot of dirt I learnt to scrub;
To cleanse the old Adam's cast-off dress
My dolly-peg was Watchfulness;
And now I'm surplice-white, I hope,
Through Prayer's all-purifying soap.

BRAND.

Shame!

EINAR.

Ditto! you've a sulphur-smell,—
A semblance of the devil's horn!
I am a chosen ear of corn;
You're chaff to feed the flames of hell. [*Goes.*

BRAND

(*looks after him a moment. Suddenly his eyes flash and he bursts out*).

This is he I deemed warmhearted!
Now the last of links has parted;
Now my own flag flies above me,
Though not *one* obey or love me!

THE SHERIFF (*hastening up*).
Worthy pastor, only hurry.
All the folk are in a flurry;
The procession's almost started—

BRAND.
Let it start—

THE SHERIFF.
But you must come!
Think, and hasten home! You're late,
And the folk will wait no longer—
Thronging forward, ever stronger,
With a pressure and a hum
Like a springtime-swollen spate!
To the parsonage they crowd,
For the priest they clamour loud:
Hear! the cry of "Priest!" again:
Hasten,—for I see with pain
They behave quite . . . inhumanely!

BRAND.
Nevermore hide I my head
Where your flock of sheep is led:
Here I stay!

THE SHERIFF.
You speak insanely.

BRAND.
'Tis too small, your way, for me.

THE SHERIFF.
All the smaller it will be
As the people crowd and throng.
There they go! It's really wrong!
Clergy, Dean, officials, pitch
Forward half into the ditch! . . .
Come, dear sir, the crush increases:
Use your influence as a whip! . . .
Ah! too late! the barriers slip—
The procession goes to pieces!

[*The crowd streams in and pushes in wild disorder through the procession and on to the church.*

SCATTERED VOICES.

Priest!

OTHERS

(*point up to the steps where* BRAND *is standing, and shout*)

Look there!

MORE VOICES.

The opening sign!

THE DEAN (*pressed in the crowd*).

Sheriff, keep them back in line!

THE SHERIFF.

They obey no word of mine!

THE SCHOOLMASTER (*to* BRAND).

Speak, and cast a ray of light
In the crowd: it's going mad!
Is not this an ugly sight?
Would you call it grand—or sad?

BRAND.

O, the people are awaking
From the swoon that held them fast!
Men, you stand at the parting ways!
Wholly you must will, forsaking
All the dead and rotten past,—
Else to build God's house of praise
Great as it should be were vain!

OFFICIALS.

Parson raves!

CLERGY.

The man's insane.

BRAND.

Aye, I was so when I deemed
That the Spirit and the Truth
Somehow, somehow still you served
Aye, I was so when I dreamed
I could make you His, forsooth,
If I bargained, if I swerved . . .

Our old church, I saw, was small;
And the craven inference drew:
Doubled—that will serve for all!
Trebled—surely *that* will do!
O, I saw not, what I sought
Found its sum in All or Naught.
Lured by compromise I erred;
But the Lord has said a word,
And the trump of doom has blown
Loud, above this house of stone:
Whispered round with fear, I heard—
Crushed, like David, when began
That dread speech, Thou art the Man—
Rapt by terror, struck aghast!
Now all thought of doubt is past.
Hear, ye people! Compromise
Is the very Prince of Lies!

THE CROWD (*in rising ferment*).
Down with those who fooled us—stole
All the marrow from our soul!

BRAND.
In yourselves the ruthless foe
Dwells, who snared and bound you so.
You have chaffered with your strength,
Cleft yourselves in half: at length
Comes dispersion, doomed to follow;
Comes the curse of being hollow!
What is it that hither drew you?
'Tis the pageant and the singing;
'Tis the music and the ringing;
'Tis to feel fine language springing
Like a flame and flickering through you;
'Tis to hear it storm and thunder,
Lisp and whisper, flow and flatter,
All the regulation wonder!

THE DEAN (*aside*).
Ha! he means the Sheriff's chatter!

THE SHERIFF (*similarly*).
That's the Dean's religious patter!

BRAND.

Sacred splendours, flaming tapers,—
All you want is the external:
Then back home to your diurnal
Drudgery, your gloom and vapours,
With a soul that, like the body,
Wears a garb of work-day shoddy;
Then the book of life is pressed
At the bottom of a chest
Till the feast comes round again!
Not for this I dared to drain
Deep the sacrificial chalice.
I would build our church a Palace,
With its mighty shadow thrown
Not o'er faiths and creeds alone,
But o'er all that God has given
Right to live beneath His heaven.
Toil of each returning morrow,
Evening's rest, and night-time's sorrow,
The delight of fresh young blood,—
All man's heart has leave to borrow
From God's store of ill and good!
For the stream that foams hereunder,
And the fall's deep-muffled thunder,
Tones the breathing storm set free,
Voices of the sounding sea,
All should merge, should find a soul,
Mingle with the organ-roll
And the songs our peasants troll!
Vile is here our work, and earthy;
Great in lies, if great at all;
Of your feeble will 'tis worthy,
Ripe, in spirit, for its fall.
Aspiration's call you shirk
By dividing up your work:
While the working week goes by,
Flies God's flag but half-mast high:
Only one day out of seven
Flies it free against the heaven!

VOICES FROM THE CROWD.

Lead us! Storm is in the air!
We shall conquer, under you!

THE DEAN.

Hear him not! His faith's untrue;
He's no Christian, I can swear!

BRAND.

No: the flaw, in me and you,
The great flaw is even there,—
In us all, for none is whole.
Faith is only of the Soul:
Point to one true Soul among you!
You have stumbled, you have flung you
Where each man has lost the best
Part of which he was possessed.
You have danced and you have struggled
As desire has piped and juggled,
Till within you ever spark
Of life's joy is quenched and dark;
So mere soul-wrecks, seared and stark,
Join the dance before the Ark.
Dotards, cripples grasp the cup;
To the dregs they drain it up;
Then the time comes for repentance,
Cries and prayers against God's sentence.
First His impress out you score,—
Biped brutes, seek mercy's door;
Seek the Lord you never heeded,
Turn to Him—when invalided!
So, his kingdom well may reel:
How should senile souls be needed
Round about his throne to kneel?
Loudly doth His voice declare:
Only when the pulses start
Freshly in the warm young heart
Doth He choose thee for His heir:
Children in His realm have part,
None can worm himself in there!
Come then all, come man and wife.

Bring young faces, fresh and fair,
Into the great church of Life!

THE SHERIFF.

Open then.

THE CROWD (*crying out as if in fear*)
Not that one, no!

BRAND.

It has neither bound nor end,
For the floor of it below
All the great green earth is spread,
Seas and fiords; for roof o'erhead
The blue heavens above it bend.
There your labour may aspire
To find place within the choir;
There your work-day toil shall mate
With your prayer, nor desecrate.
Life and faith shall merge, and be
Ringed about as is the tree
By the all-enclosing bark:
Doctrine, worship, shall be one
With the labour daily done:
All your daily care and cark
Shall in that great church unite
With the spirit's starlit flight—
Children's play round Christmas tree—
Kingly dance before the ark!

[*A tempest seems to sweep through the crowd: some draw back: the majority rally closely round Brand.*

A THOUSAND VOICES.

Light is lit where all was dark!
It is *one*, to live and pray!

THE DEAN.

O! he lures our flock away!
Help me Sheriff, Bailiff, Clerk!

THE SHERIFF (*in a low voice*).

Stop that cursed noise, and hark:
Who would butt against a bull?
Let him have his craze out full!

BRAND (*to the crowd*).

Out from here, where God is not!
Can He dwell in such a spot,
He whose kingdom shall appear
Beautiful in liberty?
[*He double-locks the church-door, and takes the keys in his hand.*
I am a priest no longer here!
What I gave, I now recall;
Not a man shall take the key
From me for your festival.
[*Flings the keys into the river.*
Now let any earth-bound soul
Through the vault's dark entrance-hole
Creep, and bend his supple back,—
Pant with poison-breathing rasp
Like a faint consumptive gasp
Through the burrow, close and black!

THE SHERIFF (*in a low, relieved voice*).

There's his knighthood gone, I vow!

THE DEAN (*similarly*).

Well, he won't be bishop now!

BRAND.

You with youth and freshness, follow
Let a life-breath blow you free
From the dust of this dark hollow!
Follow me to victory!
Some day you must needs awake;
Some day, surely, you must break,
Nobler grown, with Compromise!
Throw it off, this craven plight,
This half-heartedness, and smite,
Smite your foe between the eyes!
Challenge him to mortal fight!

THE SHERIFF.

Stop! I'll read the Riot Act!

BRAND.

Read! With you I break my pact.

THE CROWD.

Lead the way, and we will follow!

BRAND.

Over height and over hollow,
Through the country will we fare,—
Loose the folk from every snare
That their souls lie tangled in,—
Trample slothfulness and sin,—
Purify, upraise, set free,—
Men and Priests together be,—
Stamp the worn-out die again,—
Roof this kingdom to a fane!

[*The* CROWD, *amongst them the* CLERK *and the* SCHOOLMASTER, *throng round* BRAND. *He is lifted in the air on the men's shoulders.*

MANY VOICES.

Great the times are! Visions bright
Flash across the noonday light!

[*The throng of men streams up through the valley. A few remain behind.*

THE DEAN (*to those who are starting*).

O you blind ones! Whither make you?
Stop! In all his words there sounds
Satan's voice, to snare and take you!

THE SHERIFF.

Hi! Turn back! Your proper bounds
Are within your quiet valley!
You are lost unless you rally!
Ha! They answer not—the hounds!

THE DEAN.

Think upon your house and home!

VOICES FROM THE CROWD.

Towards a greater House we roam!

THE SHERIFF.

Think of all your plots and fields!
Think of all your sheep and kine!

VOICES.

Heaven's dew some manna yields
When the chosen people pine!

THE DEAN.

Scream your wives behind you, Stay!

THE VOICES (*in the distance*).

Then no wives of ours are they!

THE DEAN.

Cries your child, Must father go?

THE WHOLE CROWD.

Either friend to us or foe!

THE DEAN

(*looks after them a moment with folded hands and says forlornly*).

Deeply, deeply am I hurt!
Flock and all away he's taken,
Stripped the old shepherd to his shirt!

THE SHERIFF (*shaking his fist after* BRAND).

His the shame, the failure! Friend,
We shall conquer in the end!

THE DEAN (*almost in tears*).

Conquer? Why, we're just forsaken!—

THE SHERIFF.

Yes, but yet not beaten quite,
If I know my sheep aright. [*He follows them.*

THE DEAN.

Now the Sheriff's off! But where?
After them, I do declare!

Ha! I feel my spirits rising;
I'll go too, and try surprising—
Making prisoner those who lag!
Put the saddle on my nag! . . .
Get a surefoot mountain mare! [*They go.*

Near the highest mountain-hut above the valley. The landscape rises in the background into great, stretching wastes. It is rainy weather. BRAND, *followed by the crowd—men, women and children—comes up the ascent.*

BRAND.

Look onward! thither victory wings
The hamlet lies down yon descent;
The grey mist shuts it in, and flings
From fell to fell a filmy tent . . .
Forget the gloomy ways you trod;
Mount high, mount free, ye men of God!

A MAN.

My father is aweary; stay.

ANOTHER.

I haven't had a crumb to-day.

SEVERAL.

Yes, stay our hunger, slake out thirst!

BRAND.

Onward across the mountain first!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Which road?

BRAND.

No matter which we keep,
If to our goal it leads aright
Here, follow me—

A MAN.

Nay, that's too steep;
We shan't be at the top by night.

THE CLERK.

That way the Ice-Church lies before.

BRAND.

Steep ways are shortest: wherefore shrink?

A WOMAN.

My child is sick!

ANOTHER.

My foot is sore!

A THIRD.

Where shall I find a drop to drink?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Do something, priest, their spirits waver!

MANY VOICES.

Work miracles! Work miracles!

BRAND.

Alas! the brand of your enslaver!
The wage before the work you claim.
Shake off this deadly sloth, or else
Back to the grave from which you came!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

That's reason: first must come the fight—
We know the prize will then be given!

BRAND.

God will remember to requite
As sure as He is in His heaven!

MANY VOICES.

He prophesies, he prophesies!

SEVERAL AMONG THE CROWD.

Is the fight hot, to get this prize?

OTHERS.

And is it bloody, priest? And long?

A Man.

And must one needs be brave and strong?

The Schoolmaster (*in an undertone*).

Can I be certain of my life?

Another Man.

What's *my* share, when the prize is won?

A Woman.

You promise I shan't lose my son?

The Clerk.

Will Tuesday see us through the strife?

Brand (*looking wildly round among the crowd*).

What question you? What would you know?

The Clerk.

First, priest, how long the strife will be,—
The loss that we must undergo,—
And last, the prize of victory.

Brand.

Are these your questions?

The Schoolmaster.

Yes; down there
It wasn't all made fair and square.

Brand (*in agitation*).

But now it shall be!

The Crowd (*pressing closer round him*).

Speak, then! speak!

Brand.

You ask how long this strife shall last?
It lasts till all your life is past;
Till, breaking peace with Compromise
To sacrificial heights you rise,—
Until your will no more is weak,
And all your coward doubtings fall
Before the message, Naught or All!

And what the loss? Your idols broken,—
Your faint-heart feastday-keeping gone,—
Each golden chain, your slavery's token,—
All that your slackness slumbers on!
And what the prize? A will new-born,
A soul at one, a faith with wings;
A sacrificial joy, that flings
Even to the grave nor yet complains;
On each man's brow a crown of thorn;—
Yes, these shall be your victory's gains!

THE CROWD (*with a wild cry*).
Lost, lost! Defrauded and betrayed!

BRAND.
My word has not a hair's-breadth swayed.

SCATTERED VOICES.
You promised victory, if we'd take it!
And now a sacrifice you make it!

BRAND.
I promised victory,—and I swear
It shall be yours, if you but dare.
Who in the foremost rank would fight
Must fall to vindicate his right;
Who fears had better fling his arms
Away before the day's alarms.
In foemen's hands the flag must come
That marshals but a weakling will;
And doomed is he whom fear makes numb,
Before an arm is raised to kill.

THE CROWD.
Our fall he asks for, to our face,
To benefit some unborn race!

BRAND.
Through sacrificial wastes is trod
The way towards our Canaän,
We fall to conquer! Every man
I call on as a knight of God!

THE CLERK.

It seems we're in a pretty plight:
Down there at home we're outlaws black—

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Go where we may, we can't go back!

THE CLERK.

And none's for pressing up this height!

SOME VOICES.

Kill him!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Nay, that would make bad worse:
Once leaderless, we must disperse.

SOME WOMEN (*pointing in terror along the road*).

The Dean! the Dean!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Well, let him come!

THE DEAN

(*comes up, followed by some of those who stayed behind*).

Beloved children—O my sheep!
No more from your old shepherd roam!—

THE SCHOOLMASTER (*to the crowd*).

For us the valley's now no home;
We'd best go on along the steep!

THE DEAN.

How can you wound me,—make me grieve,
And shed for you such bitter tears?

BRAND.

Yet thou hast wounded souls for years.

THE DEAN.

Don't hear a word! He will deceive
With hollow promises——

SEVERAL VOICES.

That's true

THE DEAN.

But we're indulgent; we forgive
Where'er we find repentance due.
O, do but look into your hearts
And see the black and hellish arts
With which he drew the folk about him!

MANY VOICES.

We were bewitched! But now we scout him!

THE DEAN.

What strength have you? Just look around!
A flock that's numbered by the dozen,—
Are *you* to great achievements chosen?
Is it *your* work to free the bound?
You have your daily work to do;
Whate'er's beyond is not for you!
What would you do, caught unawares
'Mid hawks and eagles, wolves and bears?
You've no concern with battle-thunder;
You've got your humble cots to keep,
You will but serve the foe for plunder,—
Beloved children,—O my sheep!

THE CROWD.

'Tis gospel truth! Alack! alack!

THE CLERK.

And yet . . . we shut the cottage door,
When out we came, behind our back,—
We've got no home there, as before.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

He's opened all the people's eyes,
And pointed out the flaws and lies.
The people are asleep no more;
The life that satisfied before
Looks lifeless in the light of day!

THE DEAN.

Believe me, that will pass away.
Keep clear awhile of all this riot,
And things will soon run smooth and quiet.
I'll guarantee, when this is over,
You'll soon your former peace recover!

BRAND.

Choose, men and women!

SOME VOICES.

We will home!

OTHERS.

Too late, too late! The moors we'll roam!

THE SHERIFF (*hurrying up*).

O, here you are! a lucky find!

THE WOMEN.

Sir, don't be angry! you're so kind—

THE SHERIFF.

No time for that! Don't shilly-shally!
A day is dawning for our valley!
Just listen—and suppress the silly 'uns—
You'll all be rich as you can wish!

SEVERAL.

How rich?

THE SHERIFF.

Because a shoal of fish
Has come into the fiord—by millions!

THE CROWD.

What's that he says?

THE SHERIFF.

Just take your time.—
Leave this cold moor to sleet and rime!
We've never had a shoal before;
But now, my friends, our northern shore
Has clearly better times in store!

BRAND.

Choose, 'twixt *his* call, and the Divine!

THE SHERIFF.

Follow your own good common sense!

THE DEAN.

O, here's a miracle, a sign!
God means us to take warning thence!
At times of such a thing I've dreamed,—
But still it has a nightmare seemed:
This points a lesson for our lives!—

BRAND.

Yield, and you lose your Self, your Soul!

MANY VOICES.

A shoal! !

THE SHERIFF.

A most enormous shoal.

THE DEAN.

It's food and wealth for bairns and wives!

THE SHERIFF.

You see at once, it's not an hour
In foolish strife to waste your power,
With forces far your strength beyond
Which make the Dean himself despond.
You'll have a better business soon
Than all this crying for the moon.
The Lord can use His own right arm,—
Be sure that heaven will take no harm!
Don't meddle with another's quarrel,
But get your nets out,—that's my moral!—
That's something practical, you'll feel,
Which doesn't call for blood and steel,
And has a proper market price,
And needs no earthly sacrifice!

BRAND.

Yet sacrifice, in tongues of flame
Speaks from the clouds as God's great claim!

THE DEAN.

If sacrificing is the aim,
Just come and call upon me, one day,—
Say, for example's sake, next Sunday,—
I'll warrant you, I'll—

THE SHERIFF (*interrupting*).

Yes, yes, yes!

THE CLERK (*aside to the Dean*).

Shall I retain my post as clerk?

THE SCHOOLMASTER (*similarly*).

Say, will they take the school from me?

THE DEAN (*in a low voice*).

If you could make the people hark,
We should, of course, deal leniently—

THE SHERIFF.

Away, away! The minutes press!

THE CLERK.

Down to the boats, whoever's quick!

SOME VOICES.

The priest . . .

THE CLERK.

Let be the lunatic!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Forsake him—as his God forsook!
That's plain as in a printed book.

THE SHERIFF.

Aye, let him be; he's stuffed you long
With tales and dreams and foolery—

SEVERAL.

He lied to us!

THE DEAN.

His faith's all wrong!
He got a second-class degree!

SOME VOICES.

Got what?

THE SHERIFF.

A low-class character!

THE CLERK.

Yes, yes! We see that clearly, sir!

THE DEAN.

Unblessed his poor old mother went—
The man denied her sacrament!

THE SHERIFF.

He all but took his own child's life!

THE WOMEN.

Shame!

THE CLERK.

To say nothing of his wife!

THE DEAN.

Bad son, bad husband, and bad father—
As I should say, bad Christian rather.

MANY VOICES.

He pulled our parish church down, too!

OTHERS.

And then he double-locked the new!

OTHERS AGAIN.

He scuttled us in middle ocean!

THE SHERIFF.

He calmly stole my building notion!

BRAND.

On each man's brow I see the brand.
I see where this poor race will land.

THE WHOLE CROWD (*with a howl*).

Don't hear the hell-brand! Let's disown him—
Drive him—take knives to him, and stone him!

[BRAND *is driven and pelted away over the waste. Gradually his pursuers turn back.*

THE DEAN.

Beloved children—O my sheep!
In future your own firesides keep,
Be wise, a meet repentance show
And you will see how well things go!
We know, our Lord is very good;
He asks not unoffending blood.
Then, to a quite unique extent,
We boast a gentle government;
The powers that be won't make it hot for you—
Our Sheriff here will do a lot for you.
I, too, profess a Christianity
In touch with present-day humanity;
If there's one thing we all abhor it is
A war 'twixt you and your authorities.

THE SHERIFF.

Where any small defect is found
We'll try, of course, to make it sound,
When things resume a calm condition
We will appoint a small commission,
Which shall inquire to what extent
We can increase enlightenment.
Some clergy will no doubt assist—
The Dean and I will make a list—
And, if agreeable to you,
The Clerk and the Schoolmaster, too,
Shall sit as people's representatives:
Trust me, we'll find some good preventatives.

THE DEAN.

Yes, we will lighten all your grief,
As you to-day have given relief

To your old shepherd's fond anxiety!
How it must reinforce our piety—
This miracle, beyond all wishing!
Good-bye! good fortune to your fishing!

THE CLERK.

There's Christian folk, with hearts to feel!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

And such unostentatious zeal!

SOME WOMEN.

So shrewd they are, and nice, and laughable!

OTHERS.

So condescending and so affable!

THE CLERK.

They ask no wounds,—condemn them rather!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

They know a bit beyond "Our Father."

[*The crowd moves away down the hill.*

THE DEAN (*to the* SHERIFF).

Ah! this will much improve the tone!
The coming change is clearly shown.
For, God be thanked! each new attraction
Is still attended by—reaction.

THE SHERIFF.

My happy thought it was, to dish
The whole affair at once, point-blank—

THE DEAN.

Ah, we've that miracle to thank—

THE SHERIFF.

What miracle?

THE DEAN.

The shoal of fish.

THE SHERIFF (*whistles*).
That was a lie—of course, my friend!

THE DEAN.
No—was it really, though?

THE SHERIFF.
I said
Whatever came into my head.
Can that, for such a worthy end,
Be censured?—

THE DEAN.
Bless us! no, indeed;
There's good excuse in case of need.

THE SHERIFF.
Besides, a day or two days hence,
When folk have found their common sense,
Who'll care a rap if victory
Was won by truth or by a lie?

THE DEAN.
Well, I for one am no precisian.
[*Looks away far over the waste.*
That's Brand, according to my vision,
Who toils along?—

THE SHERIFF.
Without a doubt!
A lonely warrior, setting out!

THE DEAN.
Stop: just to save him from derision
There's one behind him!

THE SHERIFF.
Gerd, I swear!
Well, he and she are just a pair.

THE DEAN (*merrily*).
When his last sacrifice is done,
His epitaph like this should run:
" In memory of Brand. He had
One follower—and she was mad."

THE SHERIFF
(*putting his hand to his chin reflectively*).
But, now I come to think again,
The people's judgment one might sum
As just a little . . . inhumane?

THE DEAN (*shrugging his shoulders*).
Vox populi, vox Dei. Come! [*They go.*

In the midst of the great mountain wastes. A storm is gathering, driving the clouds heavily over the snow-fields. Black peaks and mountain-tops stand out now and then, and are veiled again by the mist. BRAND *is pursuing his way over the fells, bruised and bleeding.*

BRAND (*stops and gazes back*).
Climbed a thousand from the hollow;
Up the height not one will follow.
Every soul was fain to climb
To a loftier, greater time,—
Spoke some voice in every heart;
Up, and play the warrior's part!
'Tis the Sacrifice that chills;
That makes cravens of their wills;
Since for all one blood was spilt,
Cowardice no more is guilt!
[*He sinks down on a stone and looks shrinkingly round him.*
There were times when terrors wild
Made the hair upon me start,—
When I heard, as hears a child,
Howls and hootings in the gloom
Of a dark and haunted room . . .
But I stilled my beating heart,—
Taught my clenching lips to mutter:
There, without, it is not night,—
No, nor evening! Floods of light
Hide behind the window shutter!
Soon, I thought, the day will pour
Radiance through the open door,
All the summer's wealth and bloom,
In the dark and haunted room! . . .

Bitterly was I deluded;
'Twas but pitch-black night intruded;
And without sat downcast, bowed,
Straggling men, by creek and fiord,
With their lifeless memory-hoard—
Like the King, who, year by year,
Bent above his Snefrid's bier
Lifting corners of the shroud,
Listening for a heart-beat, groping
After crumbs of comfort, hoping,
Dreaming,—*Now* the roses red
Must bloom out upon the dead!
None, like him, rose up to own
That the grave must have its due;
No! not one among them knew
That you cannot dream the cold
Lifeless body back to living;
That its place is in the mould,
That its only work is giving
Nourishment to seed new-sown. . . .
Only night, black night again
Over women, children, men!
Would my hand the lightning wielded:
I had saved them, then, and shielded
From the coward's death-bed groan!
[*He springs up.*
Gloomy visions wing their flight
Like a hell-hunt through the night. . . .
Lo, the times are clad for storm,
Bid us shed the life-blood warm,
Bid us swing the sword, let slip
From the scabbard on the hip:
Lo, our kinsmen take the field,
But their brethren crouched concealed,—
Bid the Cap of Darkness veil them!
Bursts upon my shuddering sight
All the coward's abject plight:
Women whimper, men bewail them,
Ears are deaf to cry or prayer,
Brows this craven legend bear:—
" Pauper folk beside our boats,

In God's coinage we are groats."
Pale they hear the crash: for shield
Self-wrought weakness must avail them!
* * * * *
Viler times and visions light
Luridly the Future's night. . . .
Britain's coal-smoke, foul and black,
Sinking o'er the land is seen:
Chokes and smirches on its track
Every freshening shoot of green:
Makes the country sunshine pale
Where its poison-clouds are rolled,
Drizzles like the ashen hail
Over that doomed town of old. . . .
Viler now the race has grown:
Down the mine, where sounds the loud
Water-dripping monotone,
Puny gnomes, how shrewd and sure!
Free the prisoner of the ore.
Like their backs their souls are bowed,
And their eyes in greed are rolled
For the glittering, lying gold.
Voiceless souls and mouths unsmiling,
Hearts no brother's fall can pierce,
Nor their own disgrace make fierce:
All are hammering, coining, filing;
Quenched the light's last flickering spark;
Now the race no more will hark
To the voice which whispers, Will,
Where strength fails, has duties still. . . .
Viler times and visions light
Luridly the Future's night!
Stealthy wolves with ravening breath
Threat the sun of Christian faith:
Peals the war-cry up the North,
Calls, by fell and fiord, Come forth!—
Hears the sullen hunckback hiss:
Not for me are wars like this!
Be the stronger peoples kindled;
We are weak and we are dwindled;
Braver souls for truth may bleed!

Ask not us for noble deed!
Small our faith in Christ's redemption,—
From His war we claim exemption!
Not for us the cup was drained;
Not for us the crown of thorn
On His bleeding brow was borne;
Not for us the spear was stained
With the blood from out His side;
Not for us the Crucified
Let His hands and feet be torn!
On the list we come but low:
Not for us the cross was taken:
Us no bugle-call can waken
To the combat, soldier-fashion!
No! The cobbler's stirrup-blow,
Which but left one purple track
On the doomed Redeemer's back,
Is our fraction of His passion!
All the rest we can forego!

[*He throws himself down in the snow and covers his face; presently he looks up.*

Do I wake but now from dreaming?
All is misty, veiled and grey. . . .
Was it but a brain-sick seeming,
All I saw until to-day?
Is it lost, the Image fair,
Man received at the beginning?
Is the Spirit quenched by sinning?— [*Listens.*
Hark! there's music in the air.

An Invisible Choir (*sighing through the storm*).

Him thou never canst resemble,
Since in flesh thou art created!
Do His work, stand firm or tremble,
Fight or fly, thy loss is fated!

Brand

(*murmurs the words to himself, and says in a low voice*)

Ah! like truth those accents fall!
Stood He not in the church choir,
Threw me back my words in ire?

Took He not my joy, my all,
Closed each avenue of light,
Left me to the last to fight,
Let me tempt defeat and fall?

THE CHOIR (*sounding louder above him*).
Worm! thou never canst come near Him,
Thou hast tasted of the tomb:
Faint or follow, fail or fear Him,
Thine is still the self-same doom!

BRAND (*softly*).
Agnes, Alf! Our happy days,
Days of peace and days of rest,
All I changed for warring ways,
Tore with sacrifice my breast,—
Yet those dragons could not slay
Which upon the people prey.

THE CHOIR (*softly and winningly*).
Dreamer! Thou art of the earth!
Thou thine all hast dissipated;
Still He finds it nothing worth;—
Thou for earth-life wast created!

BRAND (*bursts into quiet tears*).
Alf and Agnes! O come back!
Where the peaks are bleak and black,
Lone I sit, the wind blows through me,
Chilled by visions wear and gloomy—
[*He looks up; a patch of glimmering light in the mist opens out, and discloses the* FIGURE OF A WOMAN, *in shining garments, with a cloak over her shoulders. It is* AGNES.

THE FIGURE
(*smiling and stretching out her arms to him*).
See, Brand! I am yours once more!

BRAND (*starting wildly up*).
Agnes! . . . O, be what you seem!

THE FIGURE.
All was but a fevered dream!
Now the mists are past and o'er!

BRAND.

Agnes! Agnes! [*Begins hastening towards her.*

THE FIGURE (*shrieks*).

Come not near!
See, the raging mountain stream
Parts us—deep the chasm and sheer!
(*Softly*). No, no more you sleep and dream;
Things are even as they seem!
You have lain in sickness, dear!
'Twas delirium made thee deem
That thy wife was gone from thee!

BRAND.

O, thou livest! Praised be He—

THE FIGURE (*hastily*).

Hush! Enough of that anon:
Come! 'tis time that we were gone!

BRAND.

O, but Alf?

THE FIGURE.

He is not dead.

BRAND.

Alf alive! . . .

THE FIGURE.

And strong and red!
You have dreamed your sorrows all,
Feigned the struggle, feigned the fall.
With your mother dwells your boy,
Tall and bright and full of joy. . . .
And the church is standing still,—
Pull it down, if so you will,—
And the parish goes its ways,
Toils, as in the good old days.

BRAND.

Good?

THE FIGURE.

The days when peace was here.

BRAND.

Peace?

THE FIGURE.

But haste, come with me, dear!

BRAND.

I am dreaming!

THE FIGURE.

Now no longer;
Warmth and care will make you stronger.

BRAND.

Strong I am.

THE FIGURE.

Not yet: the black
Dream still lurks behind your back
Yet again your feet may flee
From beside your child and me;
Mists may yet your thought obscure. . . .
O make trial of the cure!

BRAND.

Give!

THE FIGURE.

You are yourself the man,—
Use the cure: none other can!

BRAND.

Name it then!

THE FIGURE.

The aged leech,
Who knows all that books can teach,
And whose cunning none can sound,
Clue to all thy woes has found.
All thy phantoms, foul and pallid,
By *three words* were raised and rallied.
These thou boldly must erase
From thy memory's page,—withdraw
From the tablets of thy law.

They have made this sickness fall
On thee like a frenzied craze;—
Quick! forget the words, and roll
All the mists from off thy soul.

BRAND.

Say them, say them!

THE FIGURE.

"Naught or All."

BRAND (*recoiling*).

What!

THE FIGURE.

As sure as life is mine,
And as death will once be thine!

BRAND.

Woe on us! The sword once more
Hangs above us as before.

THE FIGURE.

Brand, be kind; my breast is warm;
Clasp me, dear, in thy strong arm.
Let us fly on summer's track—

BRAND.

Nay, the sickness comes not back.

THE FIGURE.

Ah, it will come; never trust it.

BRAND (*shaking his head*).

Nay, behind me I have thrust it.
Wandering dreams no more are rife:
No, the horror now is . . . life!

THE FIGURE.

Life?

BRAND.

Come with me, Agnes!

THE FIGURE.

Stay!

What would'st do?

BRAND.

What yet I may:
Live, what hitherto was dreaming;
Turn to truth what was but seeming!

THE FIGURE.

That thou canst not. Look before thee
On the way where once it bore thee!

BRAND.

Shall again!

THE FIGURE.

With dream-clouds o'er thee
'Twas a shuddering ride to take:
Wilt thou ride it free, awake?

BRAND.

Free, awake!

THE FIGURE.

The child let go!

BRAND.

Aye.

THE FIGURE.

But, Brand!

BRAND.

It must be so.

THE FIGURE.

Tear me bleeding from the mesh?
Scourge with sacrifice my flesh,
Even to death?

BRAND.

It must be so.

THE FIGURE.

Light and happiness forego?
Let no ray of sun come near thee?
See life's fruits, but pluck not any,
Nor allow its songs to cheer thee,—
I remember, O so many!

BRAND.
So it must be. Spare thy speech.

THE FIGURE.
Know'st thou what return God made thee?
Every hope escaped thy reach;
All men buffeted, betrayed thee!

BRAND.
Not for me was toil's reward;
Not for self I wield the sword.

THE FIGURE.
For a folk that delves in gloom.

BRAND.
One for many kindles light.

THE FIGURE.
O'er their future hangs the doom.

BRAND.
E'en a single will has might.

THE FIGURE.
Was not man with sword of flame
Driven from paradise in shame?
At the gate a chasm was set,
Over that no leap yet bore thee!

BRAND.
Longing finds an entrance yet!

THE FIGURE
(vanishes with a crash; the mists roll over the place where it stood, and there comes a shrill and piercing cry as from one in flight).
Die! the world has no use for thee!

BRAND *(stands a moment as if stunned).*
Ha! where thick the mists are rolled
Swift it wings across the wold;
Like a great fierce hawk it flies. . . .
Aye; one finger to demand
Was the way to clutch my hand!—
That, yes, *that* was Compromise!

GERD (*comes up, carrying a rifle*).
Did you see the hawk? The hawk!

BRAND.
Aye! For once I saw him true.

GERD.
Then pursuit he cannot baulk,—
Tell me, quick, which way he flew!

BRAND.
Weapon's tooth shall scathe him never!
'Tis at times as if he fled
Heartstruck with the mortal lead;
But when you would strike him dead,
He's behind you, bold as ever,
Fooling, beckoning you anew!

GERD.
Look! I've stol'n, to kill the brute with,
What the reindeer hunters shoot with,—
Loaded it with silver,—hark!
I am not so mad and stark
As they call me!

BRAND.
Hit thy mark! [*Turns to go.*

GERD.
Priest! thou haltest on one foot.
Why is that?

BRAND.
The people lamed me.

GERD (*nearer*).
Red, as blood from the heart's root,
Is thy brow.

BRAND.
The people maimed me.

GERD.
Once thy voice, to lull or rouse,
Had the music of the spring;
Now it grates like autumn boughs.

BRAND.

Every one and everything—

GERD.

What?

BRAND.

Deceived, betrayed, and blamed me!

GERD (*gazing at him with great eyes*).

Now at last I know thee, then!
Priest I took thee for,—a pest
On the priest and all the rest!
Thou art greatest, first of men!

BRAND.

In my madness half I thought it.

GERD.

Let me see thy hand!

BRAND.

My hand?

GERD.

Torn with nails! And in thy hair,
On thy brow, the red drops stand
Where the thorns' sharp teeth have caught it!
Aye 'tis *thee* the Cross did bear!
Father said, when I was small,
That it happened long ago,
Far from here; but now I know;
Now I see my father lied;
Thou art He, the Crucified!

BRAND.

Get thee from me?

GERD.

Shall I fall,
Kneel before thee in the mud?

BRAND.

Hence!

GERD.

O, spendthrift of the blood
That has power to save us all!

BRAND.

For my own poor soul I lack
Even salvation's smallest wrack.

GERD.

Take the rifle—shoot and kill!

BRAND (*shaking his head*).

On till death must strive the will.

GERD.

Nay, for *thee* it is not so,
Thee whose hands the nail-marks show;
All the world thy life is worth—

BRAND.

I—the meanest worm on earth!

GERD (*looks up; the clouds are lifting*).

Know you where you stand?

BRAND (*gazing before him*).

I know.
On the very lowest stair;
Sore my feet, and far to go.

GERD (*more wildly*).

Nay, but answer! Know you where?

BRAND.

Aye; the mist begins to clear.

GERD.

See how boldly Blackfell top
Points right up into the sky!

BRAND (*looks up*).

Blackfell top? The Ice-Church?

GERD.

Aye;
Art a church-goer still? Then stop!

BRAND.

O, that I were leagues from here!—
O, I yearn in all this blindness
Yearn for light, and sun, and kindness;
Sacred peace, instead of strife,
Summer in my wintry life! [*Bursts into tears.*
Jesus! I have called Thy name,
Never to Thy breast was taken;
Like some half-remembered sentence
On the tongue, Thy presence came,
Passed, and left me still forsaken.
Of salvation's robe, made wet
With this wine of true repentance,
Let me catch one corner yet!

GERD (*pale*).

What is this? Thou weepest—thou!
Tears, warm tears stream down thy cheeks,
Till the snowy grave-cloth reeks,
Slipping, dripping down the peaks;
Till my ice-bound memory clears,
Thaws within me into tears;
Till the glacier-priest lets glide
His white surplice down his side;— [*Tremulously.*
Man, why wept you not till now?

BRAND (*serene, radiant, as if grown young again*).

Frost endures throughout the Law;
Then the sunlight, then the thaw!
Till to-day, to be a white
Tablet where God's hand could write
Was the only aim I saw;
From to-day, my life shall change,
Warmth and richness in its range;
Breaks the stubborn crust: to-day
I can weep, and kneel, and pray!
[*He sinks on his knees.*

GERD

(*glances up over the mountain, and says in a low frightened voice*).

There he sits—the horrid sight!
Look! you see his shadow waving
Where he flogs the mountain-side
With his stretching pinions wide.
Now is come the hour of saving
If the silver will but bite!
[*Draws the rifle-stock against her cheek and fires. A hollow boom, as of rolling thunder, sounds down off the mountain height.*

BRAND (*starting up*).

Child? What would you?—

GERD.

Down he goes!
See! I've killed him altogether!
See how down the height he throws
Feather floating after feather!
O, how big and white he grows—
He is rolling right down hither!

BRAND (*sinking down*).

Yes, each scion of the race
For its sin must see death's face!

GERD.

Since he fell, above our head
Tenfold greater heaven is spread!
Down he rolls—he tumbles dead. . . .
Now I'll never fear him more!—
Why he's white as any dove. . . .
[*Shrieking in horror.*
O the horrid, horrid roar!
[*Throws herself down in the snow.*

BRAND

(*crouching before the descending avalanche, cries up*).

Answer me, O God above!
In death's jaws: Can human will,
Summed, avail no fraction still
Of salvation?—

[*The avalanche buries him. The whole valley is filled.*

A VOICE (*crying through the thunder-roar*).

God is Love!

APPENDIX

The following are the lines omitted at the asterisks on page 210.

Rainbow birth of fair mid-May,
Flag of Independence Day!
What has now become of thee?
Where are now the colours three,—
Those that chafed and lashed the mast,
While tempest-voiced the people sung,
Till monarch and enthusiast
Took shears and gave our flag a tongue?—
Serves the tongue, then, but to brag?
While this dragon of the dreamer's
Hides its teeth, what need of streamers?
If the king had spared his shears,
And the people saved their cheers,
Sure the four-square merchant-flag
Might have been sufficient found
To fly the signal, Ship aground!

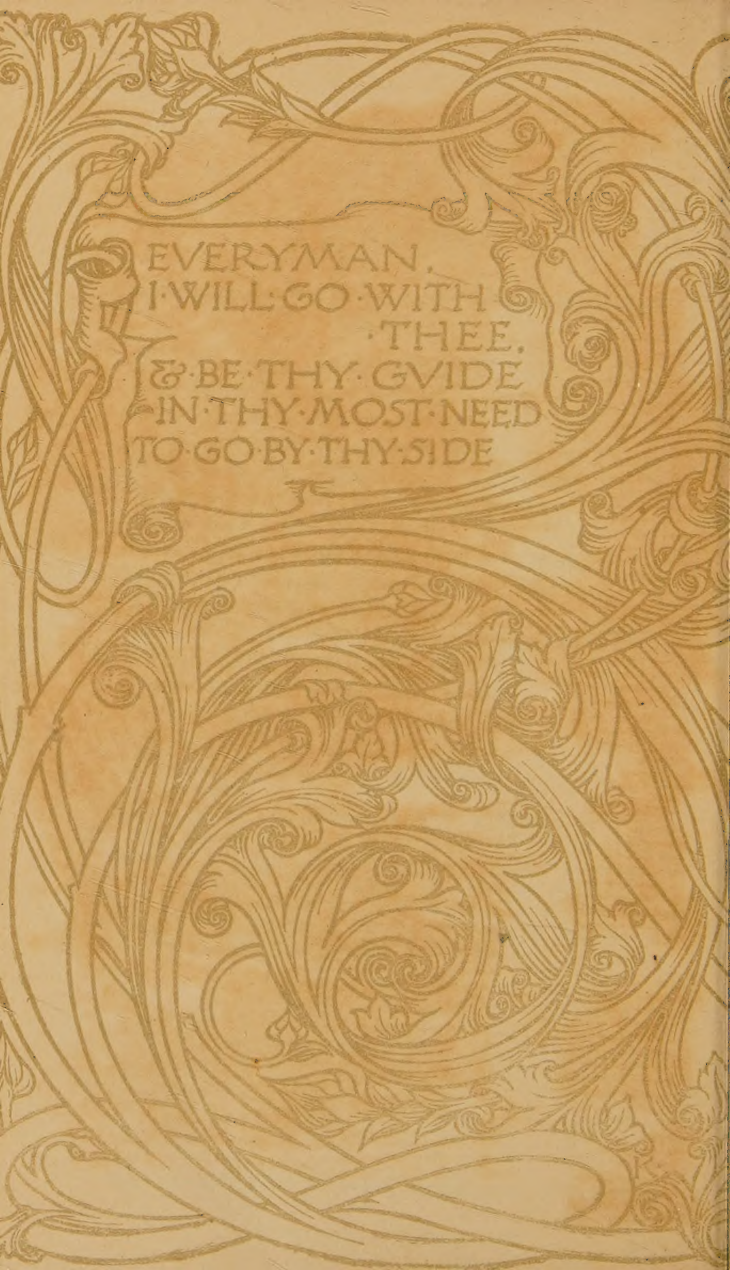
The Norwegian Independence Day is May 17th (1814). The "four-square merchant flag" is the old one of Norway and Sweden; the flag with the "tongue" is the naval one of three points, varied for Norway and Sweden respectively, which was formed by Oscar I. ("monarch") in 1844. The bard, almost the founder, of the 17th of May celebrations, was Henrik Wergeland ("enthusiast").—F. E. G.

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Summer '14

Dec 1

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EVERYMAN,
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·THEE,
&·BE·THY·GVIDE
IN·THY·MOST·NEED
TO·GO·BY·THY·SIDE

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